



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY — 28 APR 2022

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HEADLINE	04/26 Seattle councilmembers refuse return office
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3448732/rantz-most-seattle-city-councilmembers-refuse-to-return-to-the-office/
GIST	<p>Most Seattle city council members refuse to return to the office, sticking with COVID remote-work policies introduced two years ago. While they continue to stay home, other city workers were back in the office last month. The council is not offering a timeline on when they'll return.</p> <p>Socialist councilmembers Kshama Sawant and Tammy Morales and Progressive councilmembers Debora Juarez, Lisa Herbold, Dan Strauss, Andrew Lewis, Tammy Morales, and Teresa Mosqueda will not return to the office to work, according to the council spokesperson." They earn between \$65.82 and \$69.26 an hour, though they're not engaged in the same workload when they're at home. Their staff is working on hybrid schedules. The only council members to work from the office are moderate Democrats Alex Pedersen and Sara Nelson.</p> <p>In mid-March, roughly 35% of city staff worked remotely. After a return to work was announced, most of the holdouts returned to the office on at least a hybrid basis. Mayor Bruce Harrell's office reports only about 13% of the remaining staff are working from home (around 1650 employees).</p> <p>So where is the council? None of the remote councilmembers responded to my request for comment, made through the communications department, to explain why they're staying home. On Tuesday, Lewis explained to independent journalist Jonathan Choe that he is working from the office and wants to return to in-person council meetings.</p> <p>Working from home cuts off access</p> <p>The council members who are choosing to stay home are skirting their duties.</p> <p>Their decision dramatically cuts off constituents and media access to their offices. Not everyone has the time to hound council members or staff with emails that don't get answered. For example, Strauss is notoriously bad at responding to constituent complaints submitted via email. It's easy to excuse the behavior when you claim you're inundated with emails. It's harder to dismiss a complaint from someone who shows up to discuss their concerns.</p> <p>There's likely also a connection between the lack of council-focused news stories in the media and not being able to go to City Hall to start asking questions and finding evasive council members.</p> <p>Sometimes the best way to get answers, or track down stories, is to visit council members and their staff in the office.</p> <p>Council members are sending the wrong message to small business</p> <p>If the council wanted to push back at the notion that downtown is unsafe and small businesses are worthy of our support, they'd get back to the office. Not wanting to commute to city hall is no excuse to stay remote.</p> <p>Seattle workers are lagging behind other cities in returning to the office. That many workers are in the tech sector, which allows for remote work wherever you find an internet connection, explains the low number of workers returning. That Amazon loathes most council members is likely making it easier for them to justify remote work, too.</p> <p>But employees are also unlikely eager to return because downtown isn't safe. If a worker uses King County Metro to get to and from the office in or near downtown, they will understandably feel uncomfortable. Drug use is rampant, aggressive homelessness is consistent, and the lack of police staffing is consequential. Is Morales too scared to return to the office? That sends a message.</p>

	And the sooner downtown becomes crowded with residents who aren't smoking fentanyl by a bus stop on Third Avenue, the better it is for struggling businesses. On paper, the economy isn't struggling in Seattle, buoyed by the tech sector that didn't take the same COVID hit as other industries. But hundreds of small businesses closed for good and without a steady flow of workers, the remaining retail and restaurants will continue to struggle.
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HEADLINE	04/26 Seattle mayor pushes out SPD press officer
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3448929/rantz-seattle-mayors-office-demands-control-over-police-messaging-press-officer-pushed-out/
GIST	<p>The sergeant who handles media for the Seattle Police Department was involuntarily reassigned after a heated meeting with the mayor. The staff shakeup occurred after the mayor criticized perceived miscommunications between his office and the SPD, where the relationship had otherwise been solid.</p> <p>Sergeant Randy Huserik's last day as the public information officer was Wednesday.</p> <p>According to a source, Huserik learned of the decision a day after a meeting where he objected to Mayor Bruce Harrell's demand that his office screen and approve all messaging from the police department. The mayor's office did not deny this demand.</p> <p>The communications strategy has bothered Harrell, who believed that his office and the SPD are not consistent in messaging. One perceived communications mishap led to a report that upset the mayor.</p> <p>Two perceived communication missteps angered Harrell</p> <p>Harrell was reportedly angry with two recent communications missteps that he blamed on the SPD. But it appears that Harrell's own office was responsible.</p> <p>The mayor held a meeting after a <i>Seattle Times</i> report revealed that he halted a police effort to crack down on open-air drug use and drug dealing on 3rd Avenue downtown. The <i>Times</i> reported the decision was made at the "last minute," as officers were ready to use a rarely-enforced law against disorderly conduct near transit stops. It would have made an immediate impact since the department never had the staff to meet Harrell's promise of six dedicated patrol officers 24/7.</p> <p>Harrell reportedly blamed the SPD communications team for the <i>Times</i> report. But the revelation came from the mayor's spokesperson, Jamie Housen.</p> <p>"At the direction of the mayor's office, any decisions on enforcement have been postponed," Housen told the <i>Times</i>.</p> <p>Before Housen's statement, an SPD captain offered details on the strategy, presumably not knowing the mayor's office killed the plan.</p> <p>Two weeks later, the mayor was miffed by another communications issue.</p> <p>The SPD posted a photo and note on Facebook explaining that the department donated some equipment to help Ukrainians defend themselves against Russia. The donations included unused helmets, vests, and other personal safety gear. Unbeknownst to the department, the mayor's office did not want this information made public, according to a source. But no one told the communications department and it's unclear why they did not want this post to go live.</p> <p>Mayor's office seeks more control</p> <p>According to a source, the mayor held another meeting with stakeholders over his displeasure with the second communication issue.</p> <p>Harrell was reportedly unhappy for much of the call. He asked that the department run all messaging through the mayor's office to ensure they're on the same page and that the department is consistent with</p>

the mayor's statements. But a source says Huserik argued that, in some circumstances, it would not be practical to do so. For example, quick messaging concerning a public safety emergency may be necessary for certain situations.

Harrell wasn't budging from his position. He reportedly said that if the SPD communications team couldn't align with his plan, changes could be made.

The next day, a source says, Huserik was informed that he would be involuntarily reassigned.

Mayor's office doesn't deny details, otherwise has good relationship with the SPD team

There is no indication of bad blood between the two offices despite this staffing change. But there are some unanswered questions.

The mayor's office did not dispute anger over the perceived communication mishaps or demand that the department run messaging through their office. And through spokesperson Housen, the mayor's office doesn't directly answer if Harrell asked for Huserik to be reassigned.

"SPD staffing and deployment decisions are made by Chief [Adrian] Diaz and command staff. The mayor's office seeks to work closely with SPD's communications team, like all departments, to ensure message coordination and alignment," Housen emailed the [Jason Rantz Show on KTTH](#).

But if all messaging from the SPD goes through the mayor's office, which would be a new procedure, some argue this ensures Harrell will spin issues around public safety that may benefit him politically.

Spin concern from SPOG

Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG) President Officer Mike Solan is unhappy with Huserik's treatment. And he raises complaints that "some of the information shared with our community is at times filtered intentionally by City Hall to fit a specific political narrative."

"I think the sergeant's recent removal/involuntary transfer from SPD Public Affairs is indicative of City Hall wanting to control 100% of the public safety narrative from SPD Public Affairs. It is clear that if you deviate from City Hall's narrative control, you'll get removed," Solan tells the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH via email. "This sergeant has carried the water for SPD Public Affairs for over two years and has worked exceptionally hard for our community. As the labor organization that represents line officers and sergeants within SPD, we must advocate for all members. The SPD Public Affairs sergeant that was involuntarily transferred is yet another example of the city intentionally violating our CBA. SPOG will continue to professionally represent our members, and we are proud to be Seattle police officers."

I think these concerns are valid. It all depends on how far the mayor's office goes with its messaging strategy.

The valid concerns

Of course, not all message coordination would lead to spin. It makes sense that there would be some coordination on messaging in certain situations.

But this does open up the SPD to unfair criticism that they may downplay public safety concerns or inaccurately frame data in ways that can help Harrell, who campaigned on tackling the crime wave.

It's unclear how far the mayor's coordination demands go. Will the SPD communications team offer comments to reporters working on stories? Or will they effectively provide a statement from the mayor's office? How easy will it be for the SPD to coordinate messaging when there is a legitimate public safety reason to put statements out quickly? And given the chief of police is chosen by Harrell, it puts Diaz and any future chief in a tough and unfair spot. Can he speak openly and honestly in interviews or do talking points need to be approved by the mayor?

	Harrell has publicly supported the police in ways that past mayors have not. He's certainly more supportive than the city council. But this strategy opens him to legitimate criticism that he's turning the SPD communications team into another arm of his office, which won't always support public safety.
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HEADLINE	04/27 Mariupol steel plant endures Russia attacks
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/04/27/ukraine-Ukraine-Mariupol-Russia-fighting-steel-plant/2111651091338/
GIST	<p>April 27 (UPI) -- The mayor of Mariupol on Wednesday called for European allies to help rebuild the southern Ukrainian city even as Russia carried out more attacks on a steel plant where hundreds have taken shelter.</p> <p>In a video call with the European Committee of the Regions and fellow Ukrainian leaders, Mayor Vadym Boychenko said officials believe 20,000 people have been killed in Mariupol, a city of 430,000. He said it's difficult to have an accurate accounting of casualties, though, because continued Russian shelling has made it too dangerous to recover many of the dead, The New York Times reported.</p> <p>Boychenko was confident that Ukraine would ultimately defeat Russian, which has largely taken control of Mariupol, which is situated along the north coast of the Sea of Azov and near the Russian border. On Wednesday, he looked ahead to the rebuilding process.</p> <p>"Ukraine will win and we will start a huge process of rebuilding. And I am sure now and after our victory the support of European countries will be key to us," he said. "We should build the new strategy of rebuilding Mariupol."</p> <p>Though most of Mariupol is under the control of Russia, Ukrainian fighters have holed up in the Azovstal steel plant with hundreds of civilians. Petro Andryushchenko, an adviser to Boychenko, said Wednesday that up to 1,000 civilians were in the plant, while The New York Times cited a local officials who put the figure closer to 2,000.</p> <p>Andryushchenko said Russian forces were storming the plant "again and again."</p> <p>"Air attacks on Azovstal do not subside. No silence, but attempts to storm again and again," he wrote on Telegram.</p> <p>"At the same time, street fights continue again in the sector from the Azovstal plant management to the street," he wrote, according to Fox News.</p> <p>A Telegram account belonging to the city's city council shared images from inside the plant Tuesday, showing the injured receiving treatment in "unsanitary" conditions.</p> <p>"This is what the hospital in one of Azovstal's shelters looks like. Scary photos. But the world needs to know what's going on," the post read.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 US: Russia executed surrender Ukrainians
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/04/28/Ukrainians-executed-Russian-war-crimes/7051651120048/
GIST	<p>April 28 (UPI) -- The United States has credible evidence of Russian troops executing surrendering Ukrainians in Donetsk region, a U.S. official told U.N. member states seeking to hold those responsible for war crimes committed by Russia to account.</p> <p>Beth Van Schaack, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for Global Criminal Justice, revealed the alleged executions during an arria-formula meeting titled Ensuring Accountability for Atrocities Committed by</p>

Russia on Wednesday, stating if her allegation is true, the Russian troops responsible would have violated a core principle of the law of war.

"Russia has failed in its objective of capturing Kyiv, and it has failed in its objective of subjugating [Ukraine](#). But we have all still seen the Kremlin inflict massive brutality across the country, and the United States has assessed that Russia's forces are committing war crimes in Ukraine," she said, explaining the assessment is based on "careful and rigorous review" of public and intelligence sources.

She continued that during the early stages of the now-two-month-old war it appeared the war crimes consisted of the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. However, once reporters, human rights defenders and Ukrainians gained access to areas succeeded by retreating Russian troops interpersonal violence such as that seen in Bucha where Ukrainian civilians were executed with their hands bound behind their backs was revealed.

"These images and reports suggest that atrocities are not the result of rogue units or individuals; they rather reveal a deeply disturbing pattern of systematic abuse across all areas where Russia's forces are engaged," she said.

The city of Bucha, in the region of the capital Kyiv, has come to represent the brutality of Russia's war against Ukraine as the bodies of Ukrainian civilians were found scattered over its streets early this month after the retreat of Kremlin forces. Kyiv officials have blamed Russia for the deaths, stating some of the people were tortured before being killed.

Ukrainian officials have said more than 410 bodies were discovered in Bucha and surrounded cities following Russia's retreat from the region.

Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. high commissioner for Human Rights, said at the meeting her team documented during a one-day visit to the city the unlawful killing, including summary executions, of 50 civilians, mostly men but also of women and children.

She said her office is also looking into reports of other violations committed in Bucha as well as more than 300 other killings, including executions, in more than 30 settlements in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Sumy.

Her office is also looking into dozens of allegations of conflict-related sexual violence while having corroborated more than 170 cases of apparent arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances of public officials, journalists and activists in areas controlled by Russia.

"The treatment of prisoners of war by the parties also raises serious concerns. Videos apparently recorded by combatants are available online, depicting intimidation, torture and even killing of prisoners of war," she said during the meeting. "Accountability of these violations and the rights of victims to a remedy and reparations must be ensured."

Ida Sawyer, the crisis and conflict director at Human Rights Watch, told the member states that it has documented a "litany of apparent war crimes" committed in Ukraine since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.

Over the past two months since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, the human rights watchdog has documented the killing of civilians and damage to homes, schools and hospitals across the countries from apparently indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.

"What we hear again and again is that the victims of these violations want justice," she said.

Sawyer added that what they are seeing unfold in Ukraine is consistent with the war crimes they have documented Russia committing in other countries such as Syria.

	<p>"The lack of accountability for those violations has regrettably opened the door for what is occurring today," she said.</p> <p>Amal Clooney, a human rights lawyer who is a member of a task force working with Ukraine on accountability for Russian war crimes, echoed this notion that previous crimes that have gone unpunished paved the way for the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>The response from the international community to Russia's invasion was swift, with democratic nations imposing stiff sanctions against Moscow and the U.N. creating a commission to document war crimes with 13 other countries having launched their own investigations into war crime allegations.</p> <p>An unprecedented 43 countries referred the situation in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court, which responded by launching an investigation of its own.</p> <p>However, Clooney said she worries that this response will stand as the height in holding Russia to account instead of as a starting point, that the politicians' actions will amount to a wealth of investigations, reports and committees but a dearth of prosecutions, convictions and sentences.</p> <p>"Politicians calling for justice but not delivering," she said.</p> <p>"My fear is that you'll get busy, and distracted and that each day there will be a bit little less coverage of the war and people will become a little bit more numb to it and that Ukraine will end up alone in pursuing the perpetrators of these atrocities," she said. "We cannot let that happen."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Russia steps up attacks east Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-denounces-gas-blackmail-sanctions-batter-russian-economy-2022-04-28/
GIST	<p>KYIV, April 28 (Reuters) - Russia stepped up its assaults on eastern and southern Ukraine, Kyiv said on Thursday, and President Vladimir Putin threatened "lightning-fast" retaliation against any Western countries that intervene on Ukraine's behalf.</p> <p>More than two months into an invasion that has flattened cities but failed to capture the capital Kyiv, Russia has mounted a push to seize two eastern provinces in a battle the West views as a decisive turning point in the war.</p> <p>"The enemy is increasing the pace of the offensive operation. The Russian occupiers are exerting intense fire in almost all directions," Ukraine's military command said of the situation on the main front in the east.</p> <p>It said Russia's main attack was near the towns of Slobzhanske and Donetsk, along a strategic frontline highway linking Ukraine's second-largest city Kharkiv with the Russian-occupied city of Izyum. The Kharkiv regional governor said Russian forces were intensifying attacks from Izyum, but Ukrainian troops were holding their ground.</p> <p>Although Russian forces were pushed out of northern Ukraine last month, they are heavily entrenched in the east and also still hold a swathe of the south that they seized in March.</p> <p>Ukraine said there were strong explosions overnight in the southern city of Kherson, the only regional capital Russia has captured since the invasion. Russian troops there used tear gas and stun grenades on Wednesday to suppress pro-Ukrainian demonstrations, and were now shelling the entire surrounding region and attacking towards Mykolaiv and Kryvyi Rih, President Vladimir Zelenskyy's southern home city, Ukraine said.</p>

Kyiv accuses Moscow of planning to stage a fake independence referendum in the occupied south. Russian state media quoted an official from a self-styled pro-Russian "military-civilian commission" in Kherson on Thursday as saying the area would start using Russia's rouble currency from May 1.

Western countries have ramped up weapons deliveries to Ukraine in recent days as the fighting in the east has intensified. More than 40 countries met this week at a U.S. air base in Germany and pledged to send heavy arms such as artillery for what is expected to be a vast battle of opposing armies along a heavily fortified front line.

Washington now says it hopes Ukrainian forces can not only repel Russia's assault on the east, but weaken its military so that it can no longer threaten neighbours. Russia says that amounts to NATO waging "proxy war" against it.

"If someone intends to intervene in the ongoing events from the outside, and create strategic threats for Russia that are unacceptable to us, they should know that our retaliatory strikes will be lightning-fast," Putin told lawmakers in St Petersburg.

"We have all the tools for this, things no one else can boast of having now. And we will not boast, we will use them if necessary. And I want everyone to know that."

British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said Putin's remarks were a sign of "almost desperation, trying to broaden this either with threats or indeed, with potential false flags or attacks".

"Having failed in nearly all his objectives," Putin was now seeking to consolidate control of occupied territory, Wallace said. "Just be a sort of cancerous growth within the country in Ukraine and make it very hard for people to move them out of those fortified positions."

Ukrainian troops are still holed up in a giant steel works in Mariupol, the ruined southeastern port where thousands of people have died under two months of Russian siege and bombardment. Putin claimed victory in the city last week, ordering the steel works blockaded. Kyiv has pleaded for a ceasefire to let civilians and wounded soldiers escape.

"As long as we're here and holding the defence... the city is not theirs," Captain Sviatoslav Palamar, deputy commander of Ukraine's Azov Regiment, told Reuters in video link from an undisclosed location beneath the huge factory.

"The tactic (now) is like a medieval siege. We're encircled, they are no longer throwing lots of forces to break our defensive line. They're conducting air strikes."

More than 5 million refugees have fled abroad since Russia launched its "special military operation" in Ukraine on Feb. 24. Moscow says its aim is to disarm its neighbour and defeat nationalists there. The West calls that a bogus pretext for a war of aggression.

U.S. President Joe Biden is expected to deliver remarks on Thursday in support of Ukrainians, the White House said.

While Russia presses its military assault in eastern and southern Ukraine, its economic battle with the West threatens gas supplies to Europe and is battering the Russian economy.

On Wednesday, Moscow halted gas deliveries to Poland and Bulgaria for refusing to pay for supplies in roubles, its first big retaliatory strike against sanctions. The president of the European Commission called the move "blackmail".

"The sooner everyone in Europe recognises that they cannot depend on Russia for trade, the sooner it will be possible to guarantee stability in European markets," Zelenskyy said in an overnight address.

HEADLINE	04/28 Russia warns West of tough response
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warns-west-dont-test-our-patience-2022-04-28/
GIST	<p>LONDON, April 28 (Reuters) - Russia on Thursday warned the West that there would be a tough military response to any further attack on Russian territory, accusing the United States and its key European allies of openly inciting Ukraine to assault Russia.</p> <p>Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has killed thousands of people, displaced millions more and raised fears of the most serious confrontation between Russia and the United States since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.</p> <p>Two months since Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia has in recent days reported what it says are a series of attacks by Ukrainian forces on Russian regions which border Ukraine, and has warned that such attacks risk a significant escalation.</p> <p>Ukraine has not directly accepted responsibility but says the incidents are payback, while Russia has taken umbrage at statements from NATO-member Britain that it is legitimate for Ukraine to target Russian logistics. read more</p> <p>"In the West, they are openly calling on Kyiv to attack Russia including with the use of weapons received from NATO countries," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters in Moscow.</p> <p>"I don't advise you to test our patience further."</p> <p>Russia's defence ministry said on Tuesday that if such attacks continued then Moscow would target decision-making centres in Ukraine, including those where it said Western advisers were helping Kyiv.</p> <p>"Kyiv and West capitals should take the statement from the Ministry of Defence seriously that further inciting of Ukraine to strike Russian territory will definitely lead to a tough response from Russia," Zakharova said.</p> <p>Zakharova cast Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy as a puppet of the West, who was being used by the United States to threaten Russia.</p> <p>"You are being used," Zakharova said.</p> <p>The United States has ruled out sending its own or NATO forces to Ukraine but Washington and its European allies have supplied weapons to Kyiv such as drones, Howitzer heavy artillery, anti-aircraft Stinger and anti-tank Javelin missiles.</p> <p>Total U.S. security assistance since the invasion amounts to about \$3.7 billion, a U.S. official said.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin casts such large arms shipments as part of a broader plan by the United States and its allies to destroy Russia - and has promised that it will never succeed.</p> <p>Putin says the "special military operation" in Ukraine is necessary because the United States was using Ukraine to threaten Russia and Moscow had to defend against the persecution of Russian-speaking people.</p> <p>He casts the conflict as an inevitable confrontation with the United States, which he accuses of threatening Russia by meddling in its backyard and enlarging the NATO military alliance.</p> <p>Ukraine says it is fighting an imperial-style land grab and that Putin's claims of genocide are nonsense. Zelenskiy has been pleading with U.S. and European leaders to supply Kyiv with heavier arms and equipment.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Taiwan faces largest Covid outbreak yet
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/covid-business-health-asia-taiwan-f46f2cff5593fcbbc0ce9923b0e62fe8
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan, which had been living mostly free of COVID-19, is now facing its worst outbreak since the beginning of the pandemic with over 11,000 new cases reported Thursday.</p> <p>Cases have been on the upswing since late March. In April, the island's central authorities announced that they would no longer maintain a "zero-COVID" policy like the Chinese government's in which they would centrally quarantine positive cases.</p> <p>Instead, the government is asking people to quarantine at home if they test positive, unless they show moderate to severe symptoms.</p> <p>Chen Shih-chung, the island's health minister, announced Thursday they had found 11,353 new cases, along with two deaths. During the daily press briefing held by the Central Epidemic Command Center, he said 99.7% of the cases in the current outbreak either had no symptoms or had mild symptoms.</p> <p>Chin Siz-rong, a 24-year-old travel agent in Taipei, isn't planning to take any extra precautions because he already got a booster COVID-19 vaccine and is used to wearing a mask. He said he switched to takeout when he eats out alone, but still will go to restaurants with friends.</p> <p>"I already got three shots, and now everyone is saying its severity is like a cold. So I'm not too afraid for myself," said Chin.</p> <p>Most of Taiwan's 858 COVID-19 deaths came from summer 2021. Until this month, it had been the island's one major outbreak in the pandemic.</p> <p>Taiwan has been relatively lucky throughout the pandemic, but also has maintained strict border controls with a two-week quarantine on arrival required for all visitors.</p> <p>Domestically, mask wearing is universal both outdoors and indoors. Masks are legally required on public transportation and in places like shops and theaters.</p> <p>In the past few weeks, as cases have ratcheted up, people scrambled to buy up rapid tests with stores selling out in just a few hours. Convenience stores across Taipei were unsure where their next delivery would come from.</p> <p>Difficulty buying rapid tests is likely due in part to the government's thought throughout the pandemic that there are few benefits to mass testing. The health minister last year said that public funds and medical resources could better be used elsewhere.</p> <p>That changed with last year's outbreak.</p> <p>The central government this month said it would work with Taiwanese companies who manufacture tests to ensure that everyone would have access. A system was rolled out Thursday that limits each person to buying one pack of five tests per trip. Each purchase must be linked to an individual's national ID to ensure that there is no stockpiling.</p> <p>Experts are worried about the 5 million people who have not been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.</p> <p>Those who did not complete a full vaccination course are four times more likely to get moderate or severe symptoms compared to those those who have gotten a booster, said Ho Mei-Shang, a vaccine expert in Taiwan who has also worked for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, according to Central News Agency.</p>

Most vulnerable in Taiwan's outbreak this time are children and the elderly. The vaccination rate among people over 75 is 72.5%. However, only 59.1% in the same age group received a booster.

Wang Zi-yu, 78, said she overcame her hesitation and got three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

"I thought not getting the vaccine is worse. In the beginning with the AstraZeneca vaccine, I was worried," she said, referring to concerns that the vaccine could cause a rare blood clot. "And then later I got the Moderna shot and didn't have any negative reaction. It was fine."

Many of her friends are concerned about the side effects of getting the COVID-19 vaccine, Wang added.

Society's youngest are also not protected. Some schools have switched back to remote learning based on the number of positive cases each school is reporting. The island is opening up vaccine shots to children ages 6-11 next week.

A 2-year-old boy in New Taipei City died last week, the youngest victim of COVID-19 in Taiwan. His condition deteriorated rapidly after testing positive in a rare case.

Still, officials urged the public to not panic, saying that Taiwan was better prepared with vaccines and ways to ensure moderate and severe cases would get prompt attention.

"We want to tell the public, from the medical world, please rest assured," said Chiu Tai-yuan, a lawmaker who also heads the Taiwan Medical Association. "Last year's outbreak situation is not like the one we face today."

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HEADLINE	04/27 California raises gas tax by 5.6%
SOURCE	https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/california-raise-gas-tax
GIST	<p>California lawmakers appear unlikely to pause the annual summer increase in the state's gasoline tax ahead of a May 1 deadline, Gov. Gavin Newsom's office said on Monday.</p> <p>Newsom, a Democrat, had previously expressed support for helping California motorists experiencing pain at the pump by waiting to implement a 5.6% tax hike scheduled to take effect on July 1. The tax is used to fund roads and other infrastructure projects; the state's Legislative Analyst's Office projected the tax will generate about \$8.8 billion in revenue during the 2021-22 fiscal year.</p> <p>But lawmakers will almost certainly fail to stop the gas tax increase from taking place because they would need to pass legislation by Sunday in order to do so – and have yet to introduce a bill on the matter.</p> <p>"It is clear now that the Legislature will not act in time to provide that immediate, limited relief, but we look forward to working with lawmakers on the Governor's proposal for direct payments to Californians wrestling with rising prices," Newsom's spokesperson Alex Stack said in a statement.</p> <p>Prices for a regular gallon of gas hit \$4.13 on Wednesday, according to AAA, up from \$2.88 one year ago. But California – as is usually the case – has seen the steepest prices in the country, with a gallon of gas reaching \$5.68. In some parts of the state, prices are even higher: Mono County has recorded an average price of \$6.61 per gallon.</p> <p>California already has the nation's highest gas tax at 51 cents per gallon. The levy will rise to 53.9 cents per gallon at the beginning of July. Still, an analysis from LAO found it would only save drivers about 3 cents per gallon.</p> <p>Newsom's office has also floated the possibility of a rebate that could go toward residents with cars registered in California.</p>

	<p>California state Republicans introduced a bill in January that would immediately suspend the gas tax in response to the surging prices and backfill the projects from the state's \$45 billion surplus, but the proposal failed to secure enough votes in March.</p> <p>The sky-high gas prices have roots in the faster-than-expected economic recovery from the pandemic, which has triggered the hottest inflation in decades amid strong consumer demand, an influx of government stimulus and disruptions in the global supply chain.</p> <p>But in recent weeks, the war between Ukraine and Russia has sent global prices even higher as it impedes the world's access to energy supplies. Although oil prices dipped below \$100 per barrel on Monday amid talks between the two nations, gas prices remained high.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Denmark first country to halt vax program
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/28/denmark-the-first-country-to-halt-its-covid-vaccination-program.html
GIST	<p>Denmark has become the first country to halt its Covid vaccination program, saying it is doing so because the virus is now under control.</p> <p>“Spring has arrived, vaccine coverage in the Danish population is high, and the epidemic has reversed,” the Danish Health Authority said in a statement Wednesday.</p> <p>“Therefore, the National Board of Health is now ending the broad vaccination efforts against Covid-19 for this season,” it said. People will not be invited for vaccines from May 15, it said, although everyone will be able to finish their course of vaccination.</p> <p>Denmark’s Covid vaccination campaign began soon after Christmas in 2020. Some 4.8 million citizens have been vaccinated, the health authority said, with over 3.6 million people receiving a booster shot.</p> <p>At the same time, many people have been infected since the omicron variant became the dominant strain of the virus, it said, meaning immunity levels among the population are high.</p> <p>“We are in a good place,” Bolette Soborg, unit manager at the National Board of Health commented.</p> <p>“We have good control of the epidemic, which seems to be subsiding. Admission rates [to hospital] are stable and we also expect them to fall soon. Therefore, we are rounding up the mass vaccination program against Covid-19.”</p> <p>Soborg insisted that the public can still be vaccinated over the spring and summer if they want, and that vaccination sites will remain open around the country.</p> <p>He added that immunization was still recommended to people for whom Covid poses a heightened risk, such as those over the age of 40 and for unvaccinated pregnant women. “We also continue to recommend that you complete your started vaccination course,” he said.</p> <p>Vaccinations likely to resume</p> <p>Denmark’s move to suspend its vaccination program comes as the Covid situation around the world remains mixed. Europe and the U.S. have abandoned most Covid restrictions, but China is still imposing (or considering) lockdowns as the virus spreads in major cities like Shanghai and Beijing.</p> <p>Far from scrapping its vaccination program altogether, however, the Danish Health and Medicines Authority said there will probably be a need to vaccinate against Covid-19 again in the fall as the virus continues to mutate.</p> <p>New variants have emerged over the course of the pandemic, which is now into its third year. These have eroded the efficacy of the Covid vaccines that were developed in record time in 2020, although the shots</p>

	<p>authorized for use in the West remain effective at preventing serious infection, hospitalization and death from Covid-19.</p> <p>With the vaccination program likely to restart in a few months' time, Denmark's health experts will be looking at who should be vaccinated, when the shots should be given and which vaccines should be used.</p> <p>The Danish Health and Medicines Authority said it would continue to follow the development of the epidemic closely, and is ready to restart vaccination efforts again if there is a need to immunize additional target groups before the fall.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Covid puzzle: got sick, treated, sick again
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/04/27/paxlovid-second-case-covid/
GIST	<p>Shortly after he served on a jury in March, Gregg Crumley developed a sore throat and congestion. The retired molecular biologist took a rapid test on a Saturday and saw a dark, thick line materialize — “wildly positive” for the coronavirus.</p> <p>Crumley, 71, contacted his doctor two days later. By the afternoon, friends had dropped off a course of Paxlovid, a five-day regimen of antiviral pills that aims to keep people from becoming seriously ill.</p> <p>The day he took his last dose, his symptoms were abating. He tested each of the next three days: all negative.</p> <p>Then, in the middle of a community Zoom meeting, he started feeling sick again. Crumley, who is vaccinated and boosted, thought it might be residual effects of his immune response to the virus. But the chills were more prolonged and unpleasant. He tested. Positive. Again.</p> <p>Crumley, like other patients who have experienced relapses after taking Paxlovid, is puzzled — and concerned. On Twitter, physicians and patients alike are engaged in a real-time group brainstorm about what might be happening, with scant evidence to work with.</p> <p>It is the latest twist — and newest riddle — in the pandemic, a reminder that two years in, the world is still on a learning curve with the coronavirus.</p> <p>Infectious-disease experts agree that this phenomenon of the virus rebounding after some patients take the drug appears to be real but rare. Exactly how often it occurs, why it happens and what — if anything — to do about it remain matters of debate.</p> <p>What's clear is that patients should be warned it is possible so they don't panic — and so that they know to test again if they start feeling ill. More data is needed to understand what is going on. Paxlovid, made by the drug giant Pfizer, remains a useful drug, even though it has sparked a new mystery.</p> <p>“I'm not negative on Paxlovid,” said Crumley, who lives in Philadelphia and whose last positive test was a week after his second wave of illness began. “I don't know whether it's just stopping [viral] replication for that five-day period of time, and it comes back.”</p> <p>One of the top worries accompanying antiviral drugs is the threat of resistance, when the virus evolves to evade the treatment. A Food and Drug Administration analysis of Pfizer's clinical trial of the drug showed the virus rebounded in several subjects about 10 to 14 days after their initial symptoms but found no reason and no evidence that their infections were resistant to the treatment.</p> <p>Michael E. Charness, chief of staff at the VA Boston Healthcare System, published a detailed case study of one 71-year-old patient who had a relapse. The man, who was vaccinated and boosted, received Paxlovid and quickly felt better. When he developed cold symptoms a week after his case of covid had resolved, researchers sequenced the virus's genetic code and found it was the same virus surging back.</p>

That ruled out a reinfection, the emergence of a variant or the virus becoming resistant.

Charness would like to see more data and other questions answered. Should antivirals be given longer, to assure the virus is cleared? Should people be treated a second time? What are the implications for people returning to their normal lives?

“If you have a resurgence of viral load, and that happens on day 10, when CDC says you’re back to work, no mask, what are you supposed to do about isolation? Is that a moment when you’re contagious again?” Charness said. “The person we studied, we advised to isolate until their viral load was gone the second time.”

Pfizer is collecting data, in clinical trials and in real-world monitoring of the drug’s use. The company’s trial data indicates there is a late uptick in viral load in “a small number” of people who take the drug, but the rates appear to be similar among study participants given a placebo, according to company spokesman Kit Longley. The people who experienced such increases also did not develop severe disease the second time around.

Those findings suggest that Paxlovid isn’t the reason people are relapsing, because that’s happening in untreated people, too.

If that turns out to be true, it raises the concern that some people — whether they have taken the drug or not — could be infectious long after they think they are in the clear, and after guidelines suggest they can stop taking precautions.

“Although it is too early to determine the cause, this suggests the observed increase in viral load is unlikely to be related to Paxlovid,” Longley wrote in an email. “We have not seen any resistance to Paxlovid, and remain very confident in its clinical effectiveness.”

The limited evidence leaves most physicians favoring the idea that Paxlovid knocks the virus down but doesn’t knock it out completely. It’s possible that by holding the virus in check, the immune response doesn’t fully ramp up, because it doesn’t see enough virus. Once the treatment ends, the virus can start multiplying again in some people.

Philip Bretsky, a primary care doctor in Santa Monica, Calif., said he has encountered two cases among patients, both of whom were vaccinated and boosted at least once.

A double-boosted 72-year-old who had chronic medical conditions that raised his risk for severe illness started to feel unwell at the end of March. He tested positive and began a course of Paxlovid. He felt better and tested negative. Then, 12 days later, he started feeling crummy again — and tested positive.

Reinfection seemed improbable, and Bretsky thought resistance was unlikely with a five-day course of treatment.

In well-vaccinated people, being reinfected so quickly would be “like getting struck by lightning or winning the lottery,” Bretsky said. “I don’t think this is reinfection. I think this is recrudescence of the original infection.”

Experts don’t know how common this phenomenon is. Many people may not test if they get sick again after their initial infection has receded, making it hard to track.

That almost happened to Holly Teliska, 42, of San Francisco. Teliska got sick shortly after returning home from a trip to New York. She has a risk factor for severe illness and got access to Paxlovid right away. When she finished her treatment course, she took a home PCR test that was negative and felt much better, though remained fatigued.

Four days later, she came down with a runny nose and cough. She assumed she had caught her daughter's cold and powered through. Five days later, with plans to visit an immunocompromised friend, she took a test.

Teliska almost felt silly testing herself. She had been vaccinated and boosted, then infected.

"We've been saying I'm her safest friend now, now that I've had covid, so for three months, I can go spend time with her pretty safely," Teliska said. "That really threw that narrative out the window. ... This entire experience has been a real reminder there is still so much to learn."

[Paxlovid](#) is new. It only began to be used in December, so reports people share on social media of resurgent illness may be the tip of the iceberg — or might simply reflect the eagerness to learn more about a rare, intriguing outcome.

If such cases turn out to be exceedingly rare, then these case reports may be a sporadic curiosity — something to warn patients could happen. If more common, it could lead to tweaks in treatment regimens.

The mounting anecdotes are compelling to many physicians, but it's also possible the virus might rarely rebound. Yonatan Grad, an associate professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, has [studied the viral loads of NBA players and staff](#) during the course of an infection. That data, he said, shows that viral loads can bounce around.

What's "exceptionally uncommon," Grad said, is for the viral load to plunge for a few days to a level that suggests they are negative and then go up again.

Paul Sax, an infectious-diseases specialist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, recently [shared the story](#) of a patient who became infected and then relapsed after taking Paxlovid. He has heard from lots of colleagues with similar stories. But the anecdotes raise more questions than they answer.

Even if the virus has not been shown to develop resistance to the treatment during a resurgence, that's doesn't mean it won't happen, he points out. Does the treatment knock the virus down so successfully that people aren't generating a robust immune response? That could have implications for understanding whether being infected acts as a potent booster.

The phenomenon is so new that many doctors aren't aware of it. Jennifer Charness, a 31-year-old nurse who lives in Brookline, Mass., had the benefit of knowing about her father's work at the Boston VA.

Charness started sneezing in early April and got a blaringly positive coronavirus test. She has a history of asthma and was prescribed Paxlovid. As she took the drug, she saw her positive test line grow fainter and her symptoms resolve. She swabbed to make sure she was negative before going back to work, as a precaution. Then, two days later, she felt the symptoms come back and tested positive — again.

"I'm so frustrated," Charness said. "I don't think I'm going to get very sick. It's the concern of what does this mean for my viral load, and how contagious am I? And when will I not be contagious? I'm stuck back in my home again."

Charness's primary concern is that she doesn't pose a risk to anyone else. She consulted a doctor via telemedicine Friday. The practice hadn't heard of any cases like hers and decided to treat it as a reinfection and reset the isolation clock.

"I'm Day 4," she said. "Or am I Day 13?"

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/28/russia-ukraine-emergency-contraception-amid-rape-reports
GIST	<p>Efforts are under way to get emergency contraception into Ukrainian hospitals as quickly as possible, as reports of rape after the Russian invasion continue to rise.</p> <p>About 25,000 packets of the medication, also known as the morning-after pill, have been sent by International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) to Ukraine, while a network of volunteers across Europe has been collecting donations of the medication from abroad and delivering them to hospitals.</p> <p>“The timeframe for treating victims of sexual violence is really essential,” said Julie Taft, of IPPF. “If a woman is seen within five days of an event, then that medication should automatically be given to her.”</p> <p>Taft said the IPPF was also sending medical abortion pills, which can be used up to 24 weeks of pregnancy.</p> <p>While emergency contraception was widely available in Ukraine, the war has destroyed local supply chains, caused a displacement of patients and healthcare providers, and increased the rate of sexual assaults.</p> <p>“There is a demand for emergency contraception, but very rarely from hospitals in the west. It is mostly hospitals to the east, in Kharkiv, Mariupol, those regions,” said Joel Mitchell from Paracrew, a humanitarian aid organisation delivering food and medical equipment to Ukraine. “As soon as we made contact with hospitals in those regions, we had standing orders for that medication.”</p> <p>It is not clear how many of the recipients of the medication are sexual assault victims, but a volunteer with Paracrew told the Guardian that he delivered emergency contraception directly to one hospital in a town north of Kyiv, where he says he was told by hospital staff a number of rape victims were being treated.</p> <p>Ukraine’s human rights commissioner, Lyudmila Denisova, said in early April that there were nine official cases of women who were pregnant after being raped by Russian soldiers. The reports of rape victims raise concerns about areas in the east, which continue to be under Russian occupation.</p> <p>Alona Zubchenko from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said that in a crisis situation reported cases of violence, including rape, are likely “just the tip of the iceberg.”</p> <p>The UN has previously included emergency contraception in “post-rape kits” to hundreds of women and girls in armed conflicts around the world, including the Bosnian war. In addition to emergency contraception, survivors typically were given medication preventing STDs such as hepatitis B and HIV. Distributing the medication to rape survivors in post-conflict zones remains a UN policy. So far UN has sent 40 metric tonnes (40,000 kg) of reproductive health supplies to Ukraine and 33 Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) kits to 19 Hospitals in 10 regions in Ukraine.</p> <p>Denisova has said her office had officially documented the cases of 25 women who were kept in a basement and systematically raped in Bucha, a town north of Kyiv now synonymous with Russian war crimes, but the true number of victims could be far higher.</p> <p>A volunteer who evacuated residents from the towns north of Kyiv at the beginning of April told the Guardian: “What usually happens is that survivors of rape initially want to tell their story but then they go away and it isn’t until months later that they come back to talk.” She said she had encountered three women in the region who came out of houses and basements naked. One, immediately taken by ambulance, had been badly beaten and had broken bones.</p> <p>The Guardian reported this week that postmortem examinations on bodies in mass graves north of Kyiv revealed evidence that some women had been raped before being killed by Russian forces.</p>

“There are multiple psychological, emotional and physical health issues that the survivor is coping with and the anxiety around possible pregnancy is really enormous for many women,” said Taft. “It can lead to stress and PTSD, so being able to prevent it in the first place is key.”

However, the supply of pills within Ukraine has been badly damaged by the invasion and volunteers who spoke to the Guardian described multiple logistical issues delaying attempts to get the much-needed medication into the country.

“Many pharmaceuticals were previously produced in Ukraine but much of that manufacturing has stopped or became stuck in major cities because transportation is not safe,” said Taft. “Additionally, the current capacity of health providers and commodities [is insecure], particularly because we’re seeing a lot of destruction of health facilities.”

Aleksandra Weder Sawicka, a Polish activist based in Oslo who worked with Paracrew, coordinated a collection of 500 pills from Norway but drew scrutiny from the Norwegian directorate of health, which did not condone the informal donation of the medication. A big pharmacy chain in Norway also refused to deliver the medication to her for that reason. She has had to stop further donations while she tries to reach an agreement with Norwegian authorities to allow her to continue the work.

Taft said the strict control of the medication in some countries along Ukraine’s border, such as Romania, Hungary and Poland, had made the procurement of the pills more expensive, challenging and time consuming. “In those countries you can’t buy emergency medication in bulk,” she said, “so we had to procure them from providers in Denmark and the Netherlands.”

Krystyna Kacpura, director of Federa, a Polish organisation advocating for women’s rights and reproductive health, said: “International organisations reached out in the first days of the war offering to send over emergency contraception, but we had to advise them to send it straight to Ukraine through the Czech Republic, as we couldn’t be seen handling controlled substances.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 Ukraine removes Russia statues, signs
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/28/friends-no-longer-ukraine-removes-russian-statues-and-street-names
GIST	<p>At 5.36 pm on Tuesday in the historic Kyiv district of Pecherskyi, an imposing Soviet-era bronze monument symbolising the friendship between Russia and Ukraine was accidentally decapitated and then deliberately dismantled to the applause of hundreds of people.</p> <p>As local officials explained, when one country invades and bombs another, killing its people, their friendship is over.</p> <p>The 40-year-old statue, depicting a Ukrainian and a Russian worker on a plinth, was pulled down on the order of local authorities in Kyiv. It is one of the first steps of a plan to demolish about 60 monuments and to rename dozens of streets associated with the Soviet Union, Russia and Russian figures, including the writers Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Pushkin, as a result of the war between the two countries.</p> <p>Serhii Myrhorodskyi, 86, an architect from Kyiv, watched excitedly as the head of the Russian worker accidentally broke off from its body and tumbled to the ground during the removal. He did not appear bothered, despite the fact it was he who had designed the monument, erected in 1982 as a gift from the Soviet regime to the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>“It is the right thing to do,” he told the Guardian. “There is no friendship with Russia and there will not be any friendship for a long time while Putin and his gang are in this world. After they drop dead, maybe in 30 years, something will change.</p>

“The presence of the monument that represents a friendship with Russia is a sin. Removing it is the only right decision. And we could use that bronze of which the monument is made. We could melt it down and sculpt a new monument dedicated to Ukraine the motherland, which would symbolise the unity of all Ukrainian lands.”

“As for my emotions,” he added, “I am just happy to see that people are glad this whole thing is being taken away.”

As the monument began to fall, the crowd chanted: “Glory to Ukraine, glory to the heroes, glory to the nation of Ukraine.”

The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, who presided over the dismantling, said the removal of Russian symbols from the city was now under way. “You don’t kill your brother. You don’t rape your sister. You don’t destroy your friend’s country. That’s why, today, we have dismantled this monument, once created as a sign of friendship between Ukraine and Russia,” he said.

Other cities in Ukraine have in recent days begun to rename streets associated with Russian figures or to dismantle monuments related to the Soviet Union.

The city of Ternopil, in western Ukraine, has renamed a street dedicated to the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, and removed a Soviet tank and aircraft. The aircraft is to be replaced with a “heroes of Ukraine” monument.

Fontanka, a village near Odesa, decided to turn a street dedicated to the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky into Boris Johnson Street, after the UK promised to send a £100m weapons package to Ukraine.

And the mayor of Dnipro, Borys Filatov, said streets named after Russian towns would be rededicated to Ukrainian cities and symbols: Abkhazia Street became Irpin, while the street of the 30th Irkutsk Division is now called Ukrainian Soldiers.

Officials in Kyiv are to approve a law to rename 60 streets, meaning Russian writers and Ukrainians who wrote in Russian – or even assumed a Russian identity – are among those who may be written out of public life in the city. A metro station named after Tolstoy is on the list.

“The war changed everything and things have accelerated the times,” Alina Mykhailova, one of the two Kyiv city deputies who put forward the law, wrote on Facebook. “Finally, there is an understanding that [our] colonial heritage must be destroyed.”

Mykhailova and her colleague Ksenia Semenova campaigned for the removal of the People’s Friendship monument that was dismantled on Tuesday. There had been plans to remove the statue under Ukraine’s decommunisation laws passed in 2015, but at the time they received pushback from other members of the Kyiv city council, Mykhailova wrote.

The Ukrainian language and Ukrainian national identity were suppressed by tsarist Russia and its Soviet successor. Russian was considered the language of high culture and official business, and many Ukrainians, particularly peasants who moved to the big cities after the second world war, adopted Russian to distance themselves from their rural origins.

Perhaps more controversially, the de-Russification list includes Ukrainian-born writers such as Mikhail – or Mykhailo, in Ukrainian – Bulgakov, who was born in Ukraine, wrote about Kyiv, but had derogatory views about the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian national identity. His statue sits next to his former house on one of Kyiv’s most famous streets, which is now the Bulgakov Museum and is popular with tourists.

“Only idiots could do this because Leo Tolstoy is a world-famous writer, not just Russian or Ukrainian,” said Ihor Serhiivych, a Kyiv resident, inside Leo Tolstoy Square metro station.

“There are lots of [ethnic] Russians who live in Kyiv and they are probably doing more right now to protect Ukraine than those western Ukrainians who think of themselves as the elite,” Serhiivych said. He said there was a gulf in understanding between those Ukrainians who lived for a significant period under Soviet and tsarist rule and those in western Ukraine who did not.

“If it was a Putin statue I would understand, but you have to differentiate between enemies and world-famous literature.”

Another person at the station, Valetyna Hryhoryvycha, said: “I think people need to think about it a bit more. I don’t see how they relate to what’s happening now. It is part of our history.”

Ivan Andreiev, who works near Bulgakov Museum, said: “I’m for the removal of the friendship monument because there can’t be friendship between enemies. But I think it’s a fake that they’re planning on taking down Bulgakov’s monument. What Russian or Ukrainian would vote for such a thing? It’s just history.”

While Ukrainian authorities are working hard to disassemble the Russian monuments in their country, Moscow is doing the opposite in Ukrainian territories it has occupied, restoring statues and symbols of the Soviet era.

Two weeks ago in the seaside town of Henichesk, in the Kherson region, which is occupied by the Russian troops, a familiar figure returned to the main square. A statue of the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin, sporting his familiar goatee and moustache, was back on his pedestal, erected by Russian soldiers.

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HEADLINE	04/28 Day 64 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/28/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-64-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vladimir Putin has warned any countries attempting to interfere in Ukraine would be met with a “lightning-fast” response from Moscow. In an address to lawmakers in St Petersburg, the Russian president said troops would use “all the tools for this — ones that no one can brag about”.• The crisis in Ukraine must be the “catalyst for change” to overhaul the west’s approach to international security, the UK’s foreign secretary, Liz Truss, has said. Truss described Putin, as a “desperate rogue operator with no interest in international norms” and called upon the west to “dig deep” into its weapons inventories. “We’ve got to double down on our support for Ukraine,” she said.• The UK is “digging deep” into its inventories, including heavy weapons, tanks and aeroplanes, to defend Ukraine and other countries threatened by Russia, Truss added. “Some argue we shouldn’t provide heavy weapons for fear of provoking something worse. But my view, is that inaction would be the greatest provocation,” she said.• The United Nations secretary general, António Guterres, has arrived in Ukraine after meeting Putin and his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, in Moscow. Guterres will meet the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, on Thursday.• Russia has warned other EU customers may be cut off from Russian natural gas supplies if they refuse to pay in roubles. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov’s comments came after Russia halted gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria, a move that European leaders denounced as “blackmail”, which the Kremlin later denied. Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, described Russia’s move as “a direct attack” on Poland.• The White House denounced Russia’s move to cut off energy supplies to Poland and Bulgaria. Press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters at a daily briefing on Wednesday: “Unfortunately this is the type of step, the type of almost weaponising energy supplies that we had predicted that Russia could take in this conflict.”• Volodymyr Zelenskiy described Russia’s actions as amounting to “energy blackmail” against Europe in his nightly national address. Zelenskiy said Russia’s decision to cut off gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria shows “no one in Europe can hope to maintain any normal economic cooperation with Russia”.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Ukrainian commander in the besieged city of Mariupol said there are more than 600 injured civilians and fighters in the Azovstal steel works. Serhiy Volyna, acting commander of the 36th marine brigade, said hundreds of civilians including children were living in unsanitary conditions and running out of food and water. Officials earlier said Russian forces were again attacking the huge steel plant. • The interior ministry of Moldova’s breakaway region of Transnistria issued a statement claiming it came under attack from Ukraine. It said drones were spotted and shots were fired near Kolbasna, which it claims contains one of the largest ammunition dumps in Europe. • A former head of the Polish army has accused Boris Johnson of “tempting evil” by revealing that Ukrainian soldiers were being trained in Poland in how to use British anti-aircraft missiles before returning with them to Ukraine. Gen Waldemar Skrzypczak complained that a loose-lipped PM had revealed too much to the Russians and that his remarks risked the safety of the soldiers involved. • The European Commission has proposed suspending import duties on all Ukrainian products to help the country’s economy during the war with Russia. The proposed one-year suspension, which would need to be approved by the European Parliament and its 27 member states, comes a day after Britain announced it was dropping all tariffs on Ukrainian goods. • Russia’s foreign ministry announced sanctions on 287 members of Britain’s House of Commons, accusing them of “whipping up Russophobic hysteria”. The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, said those members who had been hit with sanctions by Russia should regard it as “a badge of honour”. • A top executive at one of Russia’s largest private banks said he has quit his post and fled to Kyiv to fight for Ukraine. In an interview with the independent Russian news outlet The Insider, Ukrainian-born Igor Volobuev, vice president of Gazprombank, said he “could no longer be in Russia” and that he wants to “wash off” his Russian past. • Two American volunteers fighting in Ukraine were reportedly wounded by artillery fire near the city of Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia region. US army veterans Manus McCaffrey and Paul Gray were working together as a team targeting Russian tanks with Javelin anti-tank systems when they were injured, according to reports. • The total losses inflicted upon Ukraine from the war have reached \$600bn, Zelenskiy said. “More than 32m square metres of living space, more than 1,500 educational facilities and more than 350 medical facilities have been destroyed or damaged,” he added. “About 2,500km of roads and almost 300 bridges have been ruined or damaged.”
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HEADLINE	04/27 Ottawa police chief vows to stop biker rally
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/27/ottaway-biker-rally-rolling-thunder
GIST	<p>Ottawa’s police chief has vowed to stop an upcoming biker rally from reaching the city’s downtown core as residents brace for a potential rerun of the so-called “Freedom Convoy” anti-government protests that paralyzed the Canadian capital earlier in the year.</p> <p>Thousands of bikers are expected to arrive in Ottawa on Friday for the “Rolling Thunder” rally purportedly called in honour of military veterans.</p> <p>The rally’s organizer, Neil Sheard, has denied that the event is a protest, but prominent anti-vaccine figure Chris Sky has been advertised as a “special guest” speaker, and Veterans for Freedom, a group which opposes public health measures, is also part of the event.</p> <p>Organizers had planned to march on Parliament Hill on Friday and then meet at the war memorial the following day. But the interim chief, Steve Bell, warned that a “heavy police presence” and road closures would instead greet the bikers.</p> <p>“We will not allow for unsafe or unlawful conditions that could lead to another protest, as seen in February,” Bell told the police services board on Monday. Bell said there was so far no indication the</p>

Rolling Thunder rally would become a sustained occupation like the trucker protests, but acknowledged things could change quickly. “I want to be clear with both organizers and participants: you will be held accountable for your actions before, during and after the events.”

The city is still reeling from the February protests, when hundreds of commercial trucks blockaded the streets in front of Parliament Hill, honking their horns at all hours of the day and night and defying multiple orders to leave the area.

That event began as a protest against public health measures, but quickly transformed into a broader anti-government movement, with protestors calling for Justin Trudeau’s government to face criminal prosecution.

After weeks of disruption, the federal government invoked the Emergencies Act, permitting officials to freeze bank accounts and suspend the commercial licences of truck drivers involved. On Monday, the federal government announced an inquiry into the use of the rarely-used legislation.

The protests ended after nearly a month when police stormed the blockades and arrested nearly 200 demonstrators. Ottawa authorities later revealed that [the demonstrations cost the city more than C\\$36m](#) (US\$28m, £22m).

“I do not want our children, seniors and other vulnerable residents re-traumatized. Our businesses should not be forced to close again,” Ottawa city councillor Catherine McKenney [wrote on Twitter](#) Monday.

Zexi Li, a downtown resident whose exasperation with non-stop truck honking led to a C\$306m class action lawsuit against the convoy, told the Guardian she and others fear that “mistakes will be made again” as officials attempt to prepare for the influx of bikers.

“Without a doubt, there was a loss of trust in the city, in our officials, in the police from the protests. We were just utterly disappointed by the people that were supposed to protect us,” she said.

Sheard warned earlier this week the event could turn into a “free-for-all” as bikers are forced to deviate from a previously planned route after police said they wouldn’t allow vehicles into the downtown core.

“We keep hearing that things never should have gotten as bad as they did if certain steps had been taken from the very beginning,” said Li. “Well, we know what those steps are now. So all the need to do, in theory, is take those steps.”

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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia doubles oil revenues since war
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/27/russia-doubles-fossil-fuel-revenues-since-invasion-of-ukraine-began
GIST	<p>Russia has nearly doubled its revenues from selling fossil fuels to the EU during the two months of war in Ukraine, benefiting from soaring prices even as volumes have been reduced.</p> <p>Russia has received about €62bn from exports of oil, gas and coal in the two months since the invasion began, according to an analysis of shipping movements and cargos by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.</p> <p>For the EU, imports were about €44bn for the past two months, compared with about €140bn for the whole of last year, or roughly €12bn a month.</p> <p>The findings demonstrate how Russia has continued to benefit from its stranglehold over Europe's energy supply, even while governments have frantically sought to prevent Vladimir Putin using oil and gas as an economic weapon.</p>

Even though exports from Russia have been reduced by the war and sanctions, the country's dominance as a source of gas has meant cutting off supplies has only increased prices, which were already high because of tight supply as global economies recovered from the Covid-19 pandemic. Crude oil shipments from Russia to foreign ports fell by 30% in the first three weeks of April, compared with rates in January and February, before the invasion, according to the CREA data.

But the higher prices Russia can now command for its oil and gas mean its revenues, which flow almost directly to the Russian government through state-dominated companies, have risen even while sanctions and export restrictions bite. Russia has effectively [caught the EU in a trap](#) where further restrictions will raise prices further, cushioning its revenues despite the best efforts of EU governments.

Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst for CREA, said the cash propped up Putin's war effort, and the only way to disable his war machine was to move rapidly away from fossil fuels. "Fossil fuel exports are a key enabler of Putin's regime, and many other rogue states," he said. "Continued energy imports are the major gaps in the sanctions imposed on Russia. Everyone who buys these fossil fuels is complicit in the horrendous violations of international law carried out by the Russian military."

Russia in recent days has moved to cut off fossil fuel supplies to Poland and Bulgaria, which has provoked outrage.

Louis J Wilson, senior adviser at campaigning group Global Witness, said Russia's willingness to violate its own contracts meant businesses now had no excuse for continuing to trade with Russia. "Fossil fuel majors and commodity traders who have continued trading in Russian fossil fuels, claiming that they are forced to do so by their long-term contracts, should take note of the value of the agreements they hold with Russian entities. Russia is willing to tear up these contracts to support their own war effort, yet European companies supposedly feel compelled to continue financing war crimes out of respect for them," he said.

"The corporate enablers of this deadly trade have shown they will stop at nothing to continue profiting from Russia's blood oil."

CREA's data found that many fossil fuel companies continued to do high volumes of trade with Russia, including BP, Shell and ExxonMobil.

Germany was the biggest importer in the last two months, despite repeated avowals by the government that halting dependence on Russian oil was a priority. The country paid about €9bn for imports during the period. Italy and the Netherlands were also big importers, with about €6.8bn and €5.6bn respectively, but as those countries operate major ports, which take in products for refining and use in the chemical industries as well as for domestic consumption, many of those imports were probably used elsewhere.

A spokesperson for Shell told the Guardian that the company had taken decisive action in response to Russia's war on Ukraine. "We have announced our intent to exit our joint ventures with Gazprom and related entities and to phase out all Russian hydrocarbons, in consultation with governments. Since we announced this intent, we have stopped all spot purchases of Russian crude, liquefied natural gas and of cargos of refined products directly exported from Russia."

And a spokesperson for Exxon said: "We support the internationally coordinated efforts to bring Russia's unprovoked attack to an end, and we are complying with all sanctions. We have not made any new contracts for Russian products since the Russian invasion, and there are no deliveries of Russian crude or refined products currently scheduled for the UK. We will not invest in new developments in Russia."

"Two months after Putin invaded Ukraine, Germany is still funding the Russian war chest to the tune of €4.5bn a month. Berlin is the largest buyer of Russian fossil fuels," Bernice Lee, a research director at the Chatham House thinktank, told the Guardian. "The world is looking to Germany to demonstrate strength and determination towards Russia, but instead they're bankrolling the war and blocking a European embargo on Russian oil."

HEADLINE	04/28 Corn, soybeans near record prices
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/corn-and-soybeans-near-record-prices-push-food-costs-higher-11651092056?mod=hp_lead_pos8
GIST	<p>Corn and soybeans prices have risen nearly to records, signaling higher food inflation to come.</p> <p>Global food prices had already reached records when Russia invaded Ukraine in late February and jeopardized big slices of the world's grain and oilseed supplies. Poor harvests in South America, inclement planting weather in the U.S. and rising biofuel demand threaten to stretch inventories even thinner and push prices higher.</p> <p>The price of soybeans, which are fed to cows, chicken and salmon and crushed into oils, has gained 27% so far this year. Futures are trading above \$17 a bushel for the first time since a hot, dry summer baked American farms and ruined crops in 2012. Until recently, that drought a decade ago was the only time that corn cost more than \$8 a bushel. Corn futures, up 37% this year, settled Wednesday at \$8.15, about 24 cents shy of the all-time high.</p> <p>If corn and soybeans notch new highs, they will be the latest raw materials to do so in the broadest and sharpest commodities rally of the modern trading era. Vegetable oils, oats and wheat already reached records in 2022.</p> <p>Corn is more than twice as expensive as before the pandemic and in most years without drought. Soybeans have nearly doubled their typical price, too.</p> <p>The rise in these key ingredients is spilling over into the cost of producing foods ranging from pork chops to Pepsi, eating away at Americans' purchasing power and adding another challenge to the postpandemic economic recovery.</p> <p>Food companies say shoppers have so far kept up. But analysts say there are signs, such as stronger private-label sales, that show consumers are responding to the pinch.</p> <p>"The elasticities that we're having in the business are better than historical and better than what we had planned," PepsiCo Inc. Chief Executive Ramon Laguarta told investors on a call this week. "However, we think the consumer is very early in this process of adjusting to the new inflationary environment."</p> <p>U.S. food prices in March were up 8.8% from a year earlier, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. A United Nations group said global food prices hit a new high last month, and the World Bank said it expects war in Europe to boost food prices about 23% this year, after a 31% climb in 2021 when snarled supply chains and bad weather jolted agricultural commodity markets.</p> <p>The Federal Reserve responded last month with its first interest-rate increase in more than three years, lifting the benchmark rate to a range between 0.25% and 0.5% and penciling in additional hikes. Many expect the central bank to raise rates another half-percentage point next week.</p> <p>The Biden administration doesn't anticipate food shortages at home and is directing aid abroad to places that might run low, White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday.</p> <p>"We're really conducting extensive diplomacy to encourage all countries to refrain from export restrictions and excessive stockpiling," she said. "It would exacerbate supply-chain challenges and price inflation."</p> <p>Ukraine is a major corn exporter, and there are doubts that much will be planted amid the fighting, or that bushels will make it to international markets following harvest. The U.S. Agriculture Department has lowered its projections for Ukraine's corn exports by about 30% since Russia invaded.</p> <p>Soybean gains have been driven lately by Brazil's severe drought and record temperatures, which threaten to shrink the biggest bean grower's crop.</p>

	<p>Drought is a worry in North America, too, because of the La Niña weather pattern. But currently it is cold, wet weather that is delaying planting in the Midwest. Just 7% of this year's corn was planted by the start of the week, compared with 16% a year ago, the Agriculture Department said. Soybeans are similarly behind schedule.</p> <p>This year is expected to be just the third on record in which U.S. farmers plant more land with soybeans than with corn. Soaring fertilizer prices are behind the shift. Legumes fix nitrogen in the soil and don't need the nutrient added like corn does.</p> <p>BofA Securities analysts say one way to boost food supplies would be for governments to cut rules mandating that biofuels made from crops be blended into gasoline and diesel.</p> <p>The Biden administration eased summer smog rules to allow higher blends of corn-made ethanol, an effort to tame prices at the pump. Oil producers, environmental groups and meat companies that feed their animals corn were displeased.</p> <p>The analysts forecast the U.S. will use about five times as much corn to make motor fuels this year than Ukraine typically exports in total.</p> <p>"For wealthy countries, the pressure on food supply created by biofuel blending may seem tolerable, but lower-income countries would realize greater food inflation relief from even small reductions in blending," the BofA analysts wrote in a research note last week.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia suffers another supply depot fire
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-suffers-another-fire-at-a-supply-depot-as-its-ukraine-offensive-pushes-west-11651057494?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	<p>An ammunition depot caught fire near Russia's border with Ukraine, a local official said, the latest in a series of incidents to afflict Moscow's military facilities in recent weeks that could pressure supply lines to its forces.</p> <p>The fire at the depot in a village near Belgorod, around 15 miles from the Ukrainian border, was extinguished by early morning Wednesday, according to Vyacheslav Gladkov, the regional governor.</p> <p>Authorities also reported blasts in Russia's Kursk and Voronezh regions, which are adjacent to Ukraine. The regions' governors said air-defense systems shot down drones in the early hours of Wednesday.</p> <p>The incidents follow a series of similar events in recent weeks in the regions neighboring eastern Ukraine, where Russia is attempting to seize territory. Russian officials said two Ukrainian helicopters struck an oil-storage facility on the outskirts of Belgorod on April 1. Fires broke out at two fuel-storage depots in the Bryansk region on Monday.</p> <p>Russia said the flagship of its Black Sea Fleet, the missile cruiser Moskva, sank in a storm after an ammunition explosion on board on April 14, while the U.S. said it was struck by Ukrainian missiles.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have hinted at some involvement in the incidents without expressly acknowledging them.</p> <p>"Sooner or later, debts have to be repaid," Mykhailo Podolyak, a Ukrainian presidential adviser, wrote on Telegram on Wednesday. "Karma is a cruel thing."</p> <p>Keir Giles, a Russian security expert at the Chatham House think tank in London, said Russia often suffers from accidents and disasters related to negligence and other factors, so the involvement of Ukraine was unclear so long as it didn't take responsibility for the incidents.</p>

“The system suffers from self-inflicted injuries in peacetime,” said Mr. Giles. “When put under additional strain of an offensive war, it is no surprise that the rate of natural accidents should increase.”

Russia, meanwhile, said it [halted gas flows to Poland and Bulgaria](#) beginning Wednesday, marking a significant escalation in the economic conflict between Moscow and the West. Moscow has been trying to strengthen its faltering currency by insisting customers pay in rubles, raising the prospect that Russia could shut off gas flows to other European countries in response to the [sweeping economic sanctions](#) imposed by the West for its invasion of Ukraine. Russia’s finance minister, Anton Siluanov, said Wednesday that Russia’s oil production this year could decline by as much as 17% due to the sanctions.

Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, decried the announcement from Russian gas company Gazprom as blackmail and said European Union states are working to secure [alternative sources of energy](#) and coordinate storage plans across the bloc.

“This is unjustified and unacceptable,” she said. “And it shows once again the unreliability of Russia as a gas supplier.”

Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) on Wednesday again warned of dire consequences for any country that intends to “interfere in the ongoing events from the outside and create strategic threats for Russia that are unacceptable to us,” in remarks to the Russian Federal Assembly’s Council of Legislators in Russia’s second city of St. Petersburg.

“They should know that our response to counter strikes will be lightning fast,” Mr. Putin said.

Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had told Russian media on Monday that the West was now [engaged in a proxy war](#) with Russia by arming and assisting Ukraine, and that it could escalate into a global conflict with nuclear weapons.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, speaking to reporters at Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Tuesday, said “any bluster about the possible use of nuclear weapons is dangerous and unhelpful.”

Mr. Austin met with defense officials from more than 40 countries in Germany and said that the U.S. and its allies would continue to meet Ukraine’s needs, adding that the stakes of the conflict “reach beyond Ukraine and even Europe.”

President Biden is scheduled to speak about the war in Ukraine on Thursday, the White House said.

Russia’s Federal Security Service, meanwhile, said Wednesday that two Russian citizens were detained as they were allegedly preparing to sabotage a transport-infrastructure site in Belgorod. The agency said the suspects were supporters of Ukrainian nationalists and had sent data about Russian servicemen participating in Moscow’s military operation in Ukraine to the Kyiv-based Peacemaker, a website that publishes the personal information of people who allegedly commit crimes against Ukraine and the country’s national security.

The Wall Street Journal couldn’t independently verify the agency’s report of an attempted sabotage.

Russia’s Defense Ministry said Wednesday that its forces had launched high-precision, long-range sea-based Kalibr missiles at the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, where they destroyed hangars at an aluminum plant containing a “large batch of foreign weapons and ammunition supplied by the U.S. and European countries for Ukrainian troops.” Russian defense officials said their air force hit 59 military facilities in Ukraine overnight, while Russian air-defense systems shot down 18 Ukrainian drones and a Ukrainian tactical Tochka-U missile. Russia’s claims couldn’t be independently verified.

The U.K.’s Defense Ministry said Wednesday that Russian air power is primarily focused on southern and eastern Ukraine, providing support for Russian ground forces as they gradually advance. “Russia has very

limited air access to the north and west of Ukraine, limiting offensive actions to deep strikes with stand-off weapons,” it said.

The General Staff of Ukraine’s armed forces, meanwhile, said Russia had made some advances in the east, where it is pressing a new offensive after its initial attempt to take the capital, Kyiv, and remove President Volodymyr Zelensky failed. Russian forces seized one village and took the outskirts of another as they tried to surround Ukrainian units in the east, where Ukraine has been fighting against Russian proxy forces since 2014.

Russian forces are also attempting to widen a land bridge from Russian-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region to the Crimean Peninsula in the south, which Moscow annexed eight years ago.

Concerns are growing that neighboring Moldova, another former Soviet republic, could be dragged into the conflict. The breakaway pro-Russian enclave of Transnistria on Wednesday reported gunfire and drones spotted over a village near its border with Ukraine after it said three separate attacks earlier this week targeted a Transnistrian military base, two radio towers and the headquarters of its state security service. The village, Cobasna, hosts what it says is Europe’s largest ammunition depot. No casualties were reported in any of the incidents, but they have stirred concerns that the 1,500 Russian troops stationed in Transnistria could be deployed in western Ukraine.

Moldova has been on edge since the Russian invasion of Ukraine put it on the border of an active war zone, potentially inflaming Moldova’s relationship with Transnistria. The narrow strip of land was carved out of Moldova after a civil war in 1992 and is held by pro-Russian nationalists. Many in the population of 350,000 hold Russian passports.

Diplomatic efforts to end the Ukraine conflict appear to be moving slowly. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres met with Mr. Lavrov and Mr. Putin in Moscow on Tuesday. After the meeting, Mr. Lavrov blamed the war on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s expansion and accused the West of attempting to create an alternative global governance outside the U.N.

Mr. Guterres is scheduled to meet with Mr. Zelensky in Kyiv on Thursday.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Boeing couldn’t stop finding 787 flaws
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/boeing-dreamliner-delays-faa-defects-11651067545?mod=hp_lista_pos2
GIST	<p>For years, Boeing Co. and the Federal Aviation Administration handled 787 Dreamliner deliveries as though the perfect was the enemy of the good.</p> <p>The FAA allowed the plane maker to deliver the wide-body jets with some minor flaws, so long as there was no immediate threat to safety. The expectation was that Boeing would fix such defects after the planes began carrying passengers, according to government officials and current and former Boeing executives.</p> <p>That approach doesn’t fly anymore. Two deadly crashes of a different Boeing airplane, the 737 MAX, ushered in a new era of intense scrutiny of everything rolling out of Boeing’s factories.</p> <p>The result has been a string of Dreamliner delays that have become headaches for both Boeing and the airlines waiting for delivery of scores of 787s worth more than \$25 billion. Production snafus have popped up one after the other. Some of the latest involve titanium parts, glue and fasteners, people familiar with the matter said.</p> <p>On Wednesday morning, Boeing said it had submitted a plan to the FAA for resolving production problems, a key step in restarting Dreamliner deliveries. Those could resume this summer if regulators approve the proposal, people familiar with the matter said.</p>

The FAA will no longer haggle over whether Boeing can deliver 787s that diverge from agency-approved designs and federal regulations. “Before, we’d work it out,” said one government official familiar with the FAA’s Dreamliner work. Now, this official said, “We’re not negotiating.”

Amid the scrutiny, Boeing employees found defects on their own and began taking a harder look at how the company produced Dreamliners. [They found more problems.](#)

In 2019, they detected gaps between sections of the Dreamliner’s fuselage that were slightly wider than specified in the FAA-approved designs. The gaps, about the width of a piece of paper, were wider than the manufacturing tolerance of 0.005 of an inch allowed under the approved design.

“What happens when you take a microscope to anything?” said John Plueger, chief executive of [Air Lease Corp.](#), a major buyer of Boeing aircraft that it leases to airlines. “You find more stuff.”

What previously might have been deemed minor issues are now garnering significant attention. “There is some risk of the pendulum swinging too far the other way,” Mr. Plueger said.

It isn’t that Boeing suddenly stopped making Dreamliners properly. It found previously unknown production problems that in many cases had introduced minor defects in planes already flying. Those led to more discoveries, which fueled more questions from regulators.

The halt to deliveries has [frustrated some of Boeing’s most important customers](#), including [American Airlines Group Inc.](#) and [United Airlines Holdings Inc.](#) The twin-aisle jets, whose models can carry between about 250 and 340 passengers, are popular with airlines, which often use them on long-haul international routes that wouldn’t otherwise be profitable with larger aircraft. The Dreamliner made its debut in 2011 and has had an excellent safety record.

The plane maker is counting on eventual Dreamliner deliveries this year to catch up with demand and generate cash to help it pay down its debt. Now that Boeing has submitted its paperwork to the FAA, it hopes to get a green light to resume deliveries within seven to 11 weeks, people familiar with the matter said. The FAA said Wednesday that safety drives the pace of the agency’s reviews.

During a call with analysts on Wednesday, Chief Executive David Calhoun declined to speculate about when the FAA might approve Dreamliner deliveries, but expressed confidence in the quality of Boeing’s submission to regulators. “It’s been a long, hard run, but I feel really good about where we are,” he said. Mr. Calhoun has said he is giving Boeing engineers time [to fix the Dreamliner’s problems and retool its production system](#). He has said Boeing would follow the same playbook as it did with the 737 MAX, which regulators grounded for nearly two years to fix problems related to software, hardware and training.

“We have to have exactly the same objective with the ’87,” Mr. Calhoun said at a meeting with executives in October. “If we get there—and we will—it will pay for itself.”

A Boeing spokesman said the company was completing thorough inspections of the 787 production line and supply chain to ensure they conform to Boeing’s specifications. The company declined to make Mr. Calhoun available for comment.

In February, the FAA [further tightened its oversight of the Dreamliner](#). It said its inspectors would check each jet individually, rather than let the plane maker perform routine final safety signoffs, as the FAA had permitted it to do for years.

That same month, then-FAA Administrator Steve Dickson, [who stepped down on March 31](#), said about Boeing: “They’ve got to produce the quality on their production line that we’re looking for and that they’ve committed to.”

In the years leading up to the 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019, Boeing enjoyed more sway over regulatory matters. The FAA delegated an increasing number of tasks to a group of Boeing employees authorized to work on the agency's behalf.

The 737 MAX accidents, which claimed 346 lives, exposed problems with the FAA's oversight of Boeing. A U.S. House committee's investigation documented cases in which senior FAA managers overruled the agency's front-line experts in favor of Boeing, on safety matters related to lightning protection and rudder cables. The FAA has said its managers were also aviation experts.

Congress overhauled how regulators certify new aircraft designs and [oversee employees of manufacturers](#) working on the agency's behalf. The agency now has more power to choose which Boeing employees represent the FAA's interests, and there are new protections for them from undue pressure by company managers.

"The good old days got us to where we are today," said U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen (D., Wash.), who represents much of Boeing's workforce in the Seattle area and is chairman of the House Transportation Committee's aviation subcommittee. "We have a certification reform bill because of the good old days, which were pretty bad for 346 people and family."

The problems Boeing employees found initially were minor by themselves: improper-size shims in the minute gaps they had found between sections of the fuselage, and areas where the fuselage skin wasn't sufficiently smooth.

But the imperfections could add up to a more serious problem with the plane's structural integrity, according to industry and government officials. Undetected flaws can result in premature aging that airlines don't know to check for and repair, the officials said.

After finding the Dreamliner defects, Boeing has run stress tests to determine whether the structure of any 787s with such defects in airlines' fleets could easily withstand extreme flying conditions. In August 2020, Boeing teams identified eight in-service Dreamliners that didn't meet "limit load requirements," and recommended airlines ground them for immediate fixes.

Nearly all of the rest of Boeing's analyses since then have found Dreamliners have more than enough built-in protection despite the imperfections. The flaws can be inspected and fixed, if needed, during routine maintenance.

As Boeing's factory churned out more planes, Boeing employees kept looking for additional flaws. The company halted Dreamliner deliveries in October 2020 after it found more flaws [and widened inspections](#). The process was initiated by Boeing, which reported the findings to the FAA, according to people familiar with the matter.

Boeing also pushed its global network of suppliers to examine the 787 parts they produce. Suppliers found more problems. They alerted Boeing of "notices of escape," factory jargon for defects. That meant more parts to fix, [such as titanium pieces that were weaker than they should be](#). And it meant more planes to examine, both undelivered new jets and ones in service for years.

Delays snowballed. Company projections for when it could deliver Dreamliners came and went. Customers grew frustrated.

American Airlines said [it would reduce its summer 2022 flying schedule](#) because its new Dreamliners wouldn't arrive in time. "We don't have as many airplanes as we want," then-CEO Doug Parker said at an industry conference March 15. "We're not happy about that." Mr. Parker, who remains chairman, [retired as CEO on March 31](#).

Boeing lost 47 firm orders for Dreamliners last year, leaving it with 411 deliveries to fulfill at the end of 2021, according to a securities filing.

Mr. Plueger, the Air Lease CEO, said he has repeatedly conveyed a message to senior Boeing executives in the Seattle area, where its commercial jetliner arm is based. “You just have to be a reliable partner and you have to get through this,” he recalled telling them.

Boeing has said it would book \$5.5 billion in costs related to the Dreamliner problems.

After the 737 MAX crashes, Boeing reorganized its engineering department. Part of the aim was to reduce the influence of cost and schedule on design and safety matters.

Federal lawmakers strengthened protections for employees in Boeing’s Organization Designation Authorization, or ODA, unit, who are empowered to work on the FAA’s behalf. The agency now wants to use Boeing’s ODA unit as an additional layer of scrutiny: in-house experts who are more familiar than the FAA’s staff with the Dreamliner.

It was an ODA member who flagged a quality-control problem with the Dreamliner cockpit windows, according to people familiar with the matter. Boeing drew up new specifications for the window supplier, [PPG Industries Inc.](#), a Pittsburgh company, the people said. The retooling resulted in delays for new windows. Boeing at one point was running so low on windows that it harvested spares from undelivered Dreamliners for jets already in service, they said.

The Boeing spokesman said the company was working to ensure cockpit windows meet all specifications. PPG declined to comment.

Mr. Calhoun, at the October meeting with executives, said Boeing needs to continue improving its manufacturing culture. “Our quality people don’t feel like they’re being listened to,” Mr. Calhoun said. “That has to change.”

Senior FAA officials have been broadly pleased with Boeing’s improvements but not with their pace, according to people familiar with the matter. Agency officials have at times complained to the plane maker’s executives that lower-level Boeing employees who work with the FAA haven’t seemed to be getting the message, those people said. In February, Mr. Dickson said Boeing overall had “really improved the discipline within their engineering organization.”

If Boeing manages to resume Dreamliner deliveries this summer, the freeze will have lasted about as long as the grounding of its 737 MAX.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Covid hotspot swells: 2 dozen NY counties
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/27/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#covid-hot-spot-new-york-counties
GIST	<p>The orange spot first appeared on the national risk map in early April, marking three counties in central New York as having “high” community levels of the coronavirus, the only such cluster in the country.</p> <p>By mid-April, the orange had spread to include 10 upstate counties, with a penumbra of yellow around them. Now it’s up to two dozen orange counties, stretching across upstate New York and spilling into Pennsylvania and Vermont.</p> <p>There are smatterings of orange and yellow counties elsewhere in the country now as well, but the hot spot that started in central New York is the biggest, darkest blotch on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s mostly pristine national map, and it may grow bigger still when the map is updated on Thursday evening.</p> <p>Health experts say that people in the hot spot, which includes cities like Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Binghamton, should be increasing their precautions. “These are areas where C.D.C. recommends people</p>

should wear a mask in public indoor settings due to an increasing level of severe disease and the potential for significant health care strain,” Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the C.D.C. director, told reporters on Tuesday.

But local officials have been reluctant to issue any orders along those lines. “Mandates don’t work well, they create anxiety in the community, and they’re unenforceable,” Ryan McMahon, the county executive of Onondaga County, which includes Syracuse, said in an interview. “What we have done is distribute tens of thousands of KN95 masks and Covid tests, and mail them to people’s homes.”

No one is quite sure why a new wave of coronavirus cases, [caused by](#) the highly contagious Omicron subvariants BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1, took hold first in central New York.

“It’s really difficult to attribute where this is coming from,” said Mary McFadden, the director of public health in Broome County, which includes Binghamton. “It’s literally from everywhere. It’s very difficult to pinpoint with home tests.”

Mr. McMahon said it broke the pattern of past surges. “It didn’t make a lot of sense,” he said. “Being in the middle of the state, we see the peaks halfway through, or at the end.”

He said the surge was first spotted after the February school vacation week in some of his county’s more affluent towns, suggesting that travel may have played a role. The region is also home to a large number of colleges and universities, including Syracuse University in Onondaga County and one of the largest State University of New York campuses, Binghamton University, in Broome County.

Onondaga, with 473,000 residents, uses wastewater testing and extensive surveillance testing in its schools to track the virus, Mr. McMahon said, and has started to see improvement in the data from both in the last few days. But overall test positivity rates in the county remain high, and there were [112 people](#) with Covid-19 in hospitals as of Monday, up from 51 four weeks ago.

One of the factors the C.D.C. assesses in judging risk levels is the strain on hospitals. Many of the hospitals in the hot spot region have been hard pressed to cope with the coronavirus throughout the pandemic.

Some of the orange counties are thinly populated, and a small number of cases can make per-capita rates there look inflated, said Dr. Isaac B. Weisfuse, a medical epidemiologist at Cornell University, which had a [surge of new cases](#) in March. Cornell’s county, Tompkins, is yellow but is in the midst of orange counties.

“People in the young-adult ages seem to have higher rates than the elderly, or very young people,” he said. “A packed bar with someone who’s infected, you’re going to get a lot of infections out of that, if people are not wearing masks.”

Many of the college campuses in the region have higher vaccination rates than surrounding communities. For example, Wells College has a vaccination rate above 90 percent, according to Chris Pollock, a spokesman, while surrounding Cayuga County is at 59 percent.

Broome County, like many other upstate counties, is emphasizing mask-wearing, physical distancing, vaccinations and booster doses as preventive measures, but all on a voluntary basis. “We still need to be diligent and vigilant in how we protect ourselves and those who are more vulnerable,” Ms. McFadden said.

Some colleges in the region have taken stricter steps, with vaccine mandates for students and staff and newly reimposed mask rules on campus.

	<p>As the highly infectious subvariants continue to ripple outward from the original hot spot, turning more counties orange or yellow in the Northeast and farther afield, Mr. McMahon said he was at a loss to say what might have made his county one of the first to be affected.</p> <p>“If you look at mask mandates, they came off at the same time” all over the region, he said. “Somehow the contagious subvariant got here first.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Poland, Bulgaria put up resilient front
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/27/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#poles-and-bulgarians-put-up-a-resilient-front-in-the-face-of-russias-natural-gas-blackmail
GIST	<p>WARSAW — If the plan was to terrify Poland and Bulgaria with the prospect of unheated homes and cold meals to break their will to help Ukraine, Russia chose the wrong season to halt the flow of natural gas.</p> <p>On a sunny spring day in the Polish capital, many people reacted with shrugs to the news that their country had on Wednesday abruptly lost nearly half of its gas supply. Some expressed disbelief that anyone would ever view Russia as a trustworthy supplier of anything.</p> <p>People were worried, naturally, about the rising cost of the gas. But for Poles like Arkadiusz Pawlowski, a Warsaw gardener who had already seen cooking gas prices double this year, the Russian decision only revealed to the whole world what he long considered a self-evident truth in Poland.</p> <p>“Russia can never be trusted for anything,” he said, sweating from his work trimming hedges. “We have known Russians for hundreds of years and know how they operate.”</p> <p>Poland has infuriated Moscow by letting arms from the United States and other countries flood across its eastern border into Ukraine, and by joining the Baltic States in pushing the European Union to adopt ever tougher economic sanctions.</p> <p>Acting on the conviction, or at least hope, of President Vladimir V. Putin that countries supporting sanctions will only hurt their own economies, Russia’s state-owned energy behemoth Gazprom on Wednesday turned off the tap on the Yamal pipeline, which runs from northern Siberia to Europe.</p> <p>The move deprived Poland of around 46 percent of the gas it uses, mostly for heating and cooking. Gazprom also cut the supply through a separate pipeline to Bulgaria, which also mostly uses gas for heating, which is not a big issue with the temperature now in the 60s and rising.</p> <p>Both countries are members of NATO and the European Union. The president of the union’s executive arm, Ursula von der Leyen, on Wednesday condemned what she called Russian “blackmail” over energy supplies. She added that Europe, instead of retreating from its showdown with Mr. Putin over Ukraine, was now “working intensively” on a new round of economic sanctions, the sixth imposed on Russia since it invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>With Russian coal already covered by sanctions, Russian oil is next, she said. “And you have seen today the question of gas dependency on Russia,” Ms. von der Leyen told reporters in Brussels.</p> <p>Russia’s decision to cut off gas supplies to Poland, probably Europe’s most Kremlin-skeptic country, and Bulgaria, traditionally among Moscow’s most ardent friends, came after the United States and its allies said they were stepping up the supply of weapons to Ukraine.</p> <p>Gazprom said it had singled out Poland and Bulgaria because they had refused to pay for their gas in rubles, a new condition Mr. Putin set last month in an effort to bolster the value of his currency, rewriting contracts that stipulated payment in dollars and euros.</p>

Bulgaria's energy minister, Alexander Nikolov, said on Wednesday that his country's last payment to Gazprom had bounced back because it was not made in rubles. He added that Bulgaria had enough gas to last a month while it secured alternatives.

The nation's prime minister, Kiril Petkov, also called the Russian move "blackmail," and warned that other European countries could be next. "No one should assume that Bulgaria is alone," he told reporters in the capital, Sofia.

If anything, the Russian move appeared to bolster support for Ukraine among some in Bulgaria, which remains one of the few European countries, along with Hungary, hesitant to send military aid.

"The whole world stands with Ukraine and we are the only ones still wondering what to do," said Ilka Georgieva, 46, an accountant in Sofia.

In Poland, where electricity is largely generated with coal, not gas, the government sought to assuage its citizens' fears. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki assured the public on Wednesday that gas storage tanks were three-quarters full — a much higher level than in other countries.

"Poland is secure from the point of view of providing energy and caring for our industry," Mr. Morawiecki said.

He added ominously, and without providing details, that the government might need to take "additional, radical methods" at some point and "we are prepared to do this" if necessary.

With birds singing and the sun shining, however, a possible energy crunch was far from most minds in a park in northern Warsaw.

Pawel Wiejski, an energy researcher who was walking his dog, said Gazprom may even have done Poland a favor, forcing it to accelerate an already advanced plan to diversify its energy suppliers, away from Russia and toward Norway, North America and other sources of gas and liquefied natural gas.

By cutting off supplies, he added, Gazprom had allowed Poland to get out of a contract it no longer really needed, albeit a bit too suddenly.

"Now Russia has violated the contract. So, legally, Poland is now definitely on the right side," he said. "But Russia is waging war so I don't expect they are concerned about legal niceties."

Joanna Gres, a ballet dancer with a troupe attached to the Polish military, shrugged off what she, too, described as "Russian blackmail," saying that "we have nothing to worry about if the weather stays like this."

And any problems Poland might have, she added, need to be put in perspective: "Ukrainians have much bigger problems than we do. Let's just hope the Russians are not coming here."

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HEADLINE	04/27 EU: emergency phase pandemic is over
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/world/european-union-covid.html
GIST	<p>The European Union said on Wednesday that it was moving out of the emergency phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, while focusing on vaccination, pandemic surveillance and testing in preparation for a possible new pandemic wave in the fall.</p> <p>The move comes as the number of deaths and hospitalizations across Europe has dropped significantly because of the prevalence of the less severe Omicron variant, as well as high immunization levels. Three quarters of Europeans are fully vaccinated, and over half have received a booster shot.</p>

	<p>As the burden on health care systems by the disease has decreased in recent weeks, several E.U. nations have dropped coronavirus restrictions, creating a confusing patchwork of measures across the bloc.</p> <p>The E.U. announcement — which came from the European Commission, the bloc’s executive arm — is an attempt to coordinate the management of the pandemic as it becomes less acute, although national governments continue to set their own policies on public health. Wednesday’s recommendation is not legally binding, and countries are free to follow or ignore it.</p> <p>Ursula von der Leyen, the commission’s president, said on Wednesday that it was crucial to stay vigilant.</p> <p>“New variants can emerge and spread fast,” Ms. von der Leyen said. “But we know the way forward. We need to further step up vaccination and boosting, and targeted testing — and we need to continue to coordinate our responses closely in the E.U.”</p> <p>On Tuesday, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organization, warned that a sharp fall in testing risked leaving the world blind to the evolution of the coronavirus and the potential emergence of new, dangerous mutations.</p> <p>Mr. Ghebreyesus added: “When it comes to the deadly virus, ignorance is not a bliss.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Beijing: 138 cases, 139,000 Covid workers
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/world/beijing-shanghai-covid-cases.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing
GIST	<p>BEIJING — Shanghai appeared on Wednesday to be making gradual progress in bringing coronavirus outbreaks under control, while Beijing continued finding more cases as it tries to test three times over five days nearly all of the capital’s 22 million residents.</p> <p>Shanghai announced its lowest total for new cases in weeks: 12,309. Only 171 of those were detected among people still in the broader community. The rest were among people already in isolation as the contacts of previously infected people, and were less likely to infect others, according to municipal data.</p> <p>Zhao Dandan, deputy director of the Shanghai Health Commission, told a news conference that the authorities would allow limited activities in areas with no more virus transmission outside of quarantine, but would maintain the lockdown of the rest of the city.</p> <p>Beijing officials said that they had detected 46 further cases in the 23 hours through midafternoon Wednesday, as a giant P.C.R. testing program continues. Beijing has already processed 19.8 million tests from its initial round of testing, said Li Ang, deputy chief of the city’s quarantine and testing working group.</p> <p>Beijing identified three more neighborhoods on Wednesday as high-risk and four more as medium-risk, a label that prompts lockdowns.</p> <p>The scale of Beijing’s testing program is enormous. Folding tables have been set up every few blocks near large roads. Up to a half-dozen volunteers help to direct residents and take their names, and several medical workers perform the swift oral swabs.</p> <p>Using so-called batch testing, numerous swabs are placed in pink liquid in a single test tube and sent to a lab. If the liquid tests positive for the presence of the virus, then the authorities contact each person who had a swab in the tube and conduct intensive nasal P.C.R. testing.</p> <p>Mr. Li said that the city had mobilized 35,000 medical workers who take the samples and another 104,000 volunteers and other auxiliaries to help them.</p>

At a curbside neighborhood testing site on Wednesday evening in Chaoyang, the Beijing district with the most cases, there were 18 people in line, many of them apparently on the way home from work. Two medical workers in blue full-body protective suits took oral samples at two well-separated tables.

Two other workers, in white full-body hazardous-material suits, checked identity cards. Another 11 guards and other assistants stood nearby, wearing disposable blue hospital gowns over their clothing. The line moved quickly and the tests were free.

Richard Reithinger, vice president for global health at Research Triangle Institute, a nonprofit research group in North Carolina, said that the scale of China's testing program was impressive but that some of the resources might be better used to expand vaccination. China still lags well behind Western countries in the proportion of older residents in particular who have been vaccinated.

Beijing has now had 138 cases since last Friday scattered across half of its 16 districts. Three dozen of those cases were linked to a single junior high school in southeastern Beijing.

But most Beijing residents can still move freely around the capital. Residents of inland industrial cities are being treated much less gently.

Yiwu, a city of nearly two million in central China that is a trading and manufacturing center for everything from plastic toys to American election campaign merchandise, ordered on Wednesday that no residents could leave their apartment complexes until further notice after just three infections were found there. Baotou, a steel and rare earth metals hub of nearly three million people in the Chinese region of Inner Mongolia, locked down on Monday evening after just two cases were found, and subsequently detected one more case.

The CSI 300 Index of large companies' share prices on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock markets rose 2.9 percent on Wednesday as investors appeared to conclude that the worst of the current outbreak might be past. The index dropped 4.9 percent on Monday amid alarm at the detection of dozens of infections in Beijing over the weekend.

Taking a mandatory nucleic acid test every other day is not the biggest nuisance from the continuing campaign against the coronavirus, Beijing residents said in interviews on Wednesday. Regular P.C.R. testing has already been a fact of life for many.

Zhou Yunhong, a pork butcher in north-central Beijing, said that she had been taking a mandatory test every day since February because of a government requirement on anyone working with chilled food.

"I feel it's good — testing is responsible for our customers," she said.

The biggest irritation cited by many Beijing residents lies in the stringent rules preventing them from visiting family members in other towns or from taking vacations, including during the national May Day holiday that starts this weekend.

Beijing has warned residents for months that if they leave the capital, they might not be allowed to return, for fear that they might bring the virus back from other cities. But now, other communities are starting to discourage Beijing residents from coming at all, fearing that they could also be carriers of the coronavirus.

Li Kun, an egg vendor at a covered Beijing market, said that she lived just across the municipal border in Hebei Province. But she had been unable to go home for nearly two weeks to see her daughter, who is in high school and now living alone in their house.

"The loudspeaker in our village shouts, 'Residents from Beijing cannot enter,'" she said. "I do a P.C.R. test every day, I know I'm fine, but the people in the village don't know; they are worried."

	Every night she has an online video conversation with her daughter, she said, adding: “I want to go home.”
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HEADLINE	04/27 Putin energy, nuclear threats to West
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/27/angry-putin-wields-energy-nuclear-threats-against/
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin cut off natural gas supplies to two key NATO nations, Poland and Bulgaria, on Wednesday and threatened a “lightning-fast” military response against anyone who interferes with Russia’s assault on Ukraine, pushing the fallout from the already devastating war deeper into Europe and threatening to accelerate a global energy crunch.</p> <p>The dual moves by the Kremlin come as the Russian military’s offensive in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region remains largely bogged down amid continued logistical struggles and higher-than-expected casualties, U.S. officials said. The blundering campaign has exposed underlying weaknesses inside Russia’s supposedly cutting-edge war machine, damaging Moscow’s military credibility around the world and fueling hope in the West that Mr. Putin’s Ukraine gambit will fail spectacularly.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin gave voice to that hope over the weekend, telling reporters in Poland that the West wants “to see Russia weakened to the degree” that it would be unable to mount another Ukraine-like invasion in the foreseeable future.</p> <p>Clearly angered by such comments, Mr. Putin appears determined to escalate the crisis beyond Ukraine.</p> <p>His decision to cut off gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria — purportedly because the countries refused a demand to change the purchase contract and pay in rubles — confirms Western fears that the Kremlin is willing to use energy as a wartime weapon. European leaders called the move “blackmail” and said it will only speed up Europe’s move away from a heavy dependence on Russian fuel.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s threats went far beyond energy. Speaking to lawmakers in St. Petersburg, the Russian leader seemed to hint at the use of nuclear weapons against any nation that directly intervenes in the Russia-Ukraine war, and there is little doubt that such warnings were aimed squarely at Washington.</p> <p>“If anyone sets out to intervene in the current events from the outside and creates unacceptable threats for us that are strategic in nature, they should know that our response ... will be lightning-fast,” Mr. Putin said, according to English-language media translations of his remarks. “We have all the tools for this, that no one else can boast of having. We won’t boast about it. We’ll use them, if needed. And I want everyone to know that.”</p> <p>A number of Mr. Putin’s advisers, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, have issued the same broadly worded threats in recent days, even as U.S. and allied weaponry pour into Ukraine.</p> <p>Mr. Putin said Russia has “already taken all the decisions on this,” suggesting that the Kremlin has discussed how and under what circumstances the Russian military would respond to Western intervention.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Europe was forced to grapple with the growing likelihood that Mr. Putin will cut off energy supplies to any nation that aids Ukraine in any way, including those that provide weapons, vehicles and logistical support to the Ukrainian military. Poland, for example, has been at the forefront of Western aid and has served as a key hub for the movement of supplies and weapons across the border into Ukraine. It also has provided sanctuary for more Ukrainian refugees than any other country since the Feb. 24 invasion began.</p> <p>Gas prices shot up across Europe amid news of the cutoff. Russian officials seemed to warn that other nations will meet the same fate if they refuse to pay for their fuel in rubles, the Russian currency that has taken a tremendous hit over the past several months amid massive NATO economic sanctions on Moscow.</p>

Despite the short-term economic toll, European leaders stood firm.

“We will not succumb to such a racket,” said Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov.

European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the move is Russia’s attempt to use “fossil fuels to try to blackmail us” but such a strategy will fail.

“Today, the Kremlin failed once again in this attempt to sow division amongst member states. The era of Russian fossil fuel in Europe is coming to an end,” she said.

Shifting landscape

On the battlefield, Russian forces captured several small towns in eastern Ukraine but have failed to make any significant breakthroughs since redirecting the bulk of their military might away from the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and toward the divided Donbas region. Ukrainian forces holed up in the devastated city of Mariupol refused to surrender, depriving Russia of a crucial land bridge from the Donbas to the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia forcibly annexed in 2014.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, fresh from a visit with Mr. Putin in Moscow on Tuesday, was in Kyiv for talks with the government of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Establishing humanitarian “corridors” for Ukrainian civilians trapped by the fighting in the south and east was one focus of the visit, U.N. officials said.

Two American military veterans who volunteered to fight with Ukrainian forces against the Russian invaders were reportedly wounded by artillery fire near the city of Orikhiv in the Zaporizhzhia region. U.S. Army veterans Manus McCaffrey and Paul Gray had been helping target Russian tanks when they were injured, journalist Nolan Peterson reported on Twitter.

With the war now in its third month, Russia and Ukraine are forced to deal with rapidly shifting attitudes abroad toward the conflict. DJI Technology Co., the Chinese manufacturer that claims a massive share of the global market for commercial drones, said Wednesday that it is suspending sales to Russia and Ukraine.

Many Chinese manufacturers and financial firms have continued to do business in Russia even as Western companies pull out and announce boycotts. But China’s two-way trade with Russia is dwarfed by the volume of trade it does with the U.S. and the European Union.

A DJI spokesman told the Reuters news agency that the decision to suspend sales to both countries was not meant as a political statement.

“DJI abhors any use of our drones to cause harm, and we are temporarily suspending sales in these countries in order to help ensure no one uses our drones in combat,” the spokesman said.

International aid has been key to Ukrainian forces’ success against the Russian invaders. Perhaps most important have been U.S.-provided Javelin anti-tank missiles that have proved remarkably effective at destroying Russian armored columns.

The White House announced that President Biden will visit a Lockheed Martin Javelin anti-tank missile factory in Alabama next week, a symbolic move as some lawmakers warn that the U.S. is too quickly depleting its own stockpile of Javelins.

The U.S. supply has dropped about 33% since Russia invaded Ukraine, and lawmakers have pressured Mr. Biden to invoke the Defense Production Act to ramp up the manufacturing of Javelins.

	<p>While the U.S. has facilitated the relatively quick movement of Javelins to Ukraine, some Ukrainian officials say Washington and its allies aren't moving fast enough to provide other desperately needed equipment.</p> <p>Maryan Zablotsky, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, told The Washington Times on Wednesday that U.S. export law has hindered the delivery of body armor that can protect individuals from ammunition shot from high-caliber firearms such as Kalashnikovs.</p> <p>"American legislation is unfortunately very complex, and it treats anything related to war efforts as something lethal. So the problems that we've been having, even though some Ukrainians were ordering the purchasing of different bulletproof vests, they still require an export license," he said, adding that a special registration is necessary to attain the license.</p> <p>"So the experience of Ukrainians purchasing bulletproof vests from the U.S. has been relatively poor," he said, noting that many have told him that most of the vests have been stuck on the border.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 DHS insists southern border is secure
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/27/alejandro-mayorkas-dhs-chief-insists-mexican-borde/
GIST	<p>Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas vowed to Congress on Wednesday that the U.S. will maintain control of the Mexican border amid the looming surge of migrants, insisting that the Biden administration has a plan for dealing with the expected influx of more than a half-million illegal immigrants a month.</p> <p>Republicans were incredulous. They said Mr. Mayorkas' agents and officers have revealed that they are already stretched beyond breaking and that the looming end of President Trump's COVID-related border shutdown policy next month will make it worse.</p> <p>"Do you believe front-line agents and officers?" Rep. John Katko of New York, the top Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee, asked Mr. Mayorkas. "There's not a single person on the border today that will tell you once Title 42 is lifted they won't lose operational control."</p> <p>Title 42 is the statute allowing tighter security at the border based on the public health need to control the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Mr. Mayorkas said the border is secure and promised lawmakers: "We will not lose operational control of the border."</p> <p>Rep. Michael T. McCaul, Texas Republican, said the assurance didn't match his experience.</p> <p>"I have never seen the border more broken. It is not under operational control. It is out of control," he said.</p> <p>Mr. Mayorkas faces two days of questioning on Capitol Hill, where Republicans and some Democrats said they were disappointed with Biden administration border policies over the past 15 months and a lack of planning for even worse days ahead.</p> <p>Department of Homeland Security officials are preparing for as many as 18,000 illegal immigrants a day to surge across the southern border when Title 42 is lifted.</p> <p>Mr. Mayorkas called that estimate a worst-case plan rather than a prediction, though he acknowledges that more people will come, topping the already record levels.</p> <p>He released a 20-page plan Tuesday that he said will defend against the surge. It relocates some personnel, tries to streamline processing for border jumpers, and appeals to Mexico and Central American countries to block migrants making the journey.</p>

Republicans wondered why the plan was announced now even though the border has been in chaos for more than a year. Mr. Mayorkas said much of the plan already was “underway.” Republicans said it didn’t seem like much of a plan, given the results.

The department tallied more than 220,000 encounters with border jumpers in March and has been above 150,000 every month since February 2020. That is the longest sustained level of illegal apprehensions on record.

“Are you testifying as you sit here today that the southwest border is secure?” asked Rep. Michael Guest, Mississippi Republican.

“Yes, I am,” Mr. Mayorkas said. He refused Republican demands to apologize and argued that he is doing a better job than the Trump administration.

Rep. Dan Bishop, North Carolina Republican, asked about the record number of migrants who died at the border last year. Mr. Mayorkas, citing immigrant rights groups, countered that 1,500 migrants were abused, kidnapped or killed under the Trump administration’s “Remain in Mexico” policy.

Asked to say something to Americans who might be victimized by illegal immigrants caught and released into the country, Mr. Mayorkas said the Homeland Security Department under his watch has ousted a higher number of aggravated felons.

“We are more focused on public safety threats, true public safety threats to the homeland, than the prior administration was,” he said.

Democrats said blame for border problems lies not with Mr. Mayorkas but with Congress. They said lawmakers need to pass a broad bill dealing with the border and legalizing the current illegal immigrant population.

“We are more culpable than anyone because we are the ones who set the laws,” said Rep. Elissa Slotkin, Michigan Democrat.

Exploding numbers

Republicans said Mr. Biden erased Trump-era policies such as a border wall, only to see illegal crossings soar. They said that’s the message they get from Border Patrol agents.

“Every single one of them has said in order for them to do their job, they needed that wall to be constructed, they needed the policies that were in place during the Trump administration to be reinstated and they needed more people. Every single one of them,” said Rep. Carlos A. Gimenez, Florida Republican.

Mr. Mayorkas said the wall can be breached. He said technology is the answer.

Under orders from Mr. Biden, Mr. Mayorkas has put a hold on wall construction and canceled a number of projects. He revealed that his department has spent \$72 million on cancellation fees to get out of contracts and deal with materials already bought.

That doesn’t include as much as \$2 billion that the Pentagon spent to cancel wall-building contracts under its purview, according to an estimate by Sen. James Lankford, Oklahoma Republican.

As much as \$2.5 billion in wall money that Congress approved in past years that Mr. Biden has not been able to cancel is still in the pipeline.

Mr. Mayorkas said he will spend that money, though in his own way.

	<p>“We are well aware of our responsibility to spend the funds that have been appropriated to the wall,” he said. “We are undertaking an analysis of how most effectively to do so while honoring the president’s commitment. We are dedicated to spending those funds in a way that enhances safety and security.”</p> <p>He said he has authorized the construction of 68 projects, completing gates and closing “gaps” in the wall. Mr. Mayorkas also said officials are working on “infirmities” in construction under Mr. Trump.</p> <p>“We’re seeing corrosion and other failings,” he said.</p> <p>Rep. Ashley Hinson, Iowa Republican, displayed a photo showing piles of steel that were supposed to be used for wall construction but were left to rust after construction halted.</p> <p>“This is corrosion right here,” she told the secretary. “To taxpayers, they see this as a huge slap in the face to see these pieces sitting there that could be used to actually deter people from coming into our country.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Army report: Putin’s dysfunctional war
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/27/army-reports-putins-dysfunctional-war/
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin badly miscalculated in launching the invasion of Ukraine and falsely believed his army could rapidly overrun the country, according to an analysis of the war published by the Army War College.</p> <p>According to the journal report, Russian state media outlet RIA Novosti accidentally leaked Mr. Putin’s war objectives for Ukraine days after the invasion began. The plan called for taking the capital of Kyiv in two days and creating a new world order led by Russia and China.</p> <p>Instead, the military operation is failing on many fronts.</p> <p>“While Russia’s operational dysfunctionality has prevented military success, the political miscalculations made by the Kremlin have been even more significant,” concludes military analyst and article author Rob Johnson, writing in the college’s journal Parameters published this week. “Whether the Russian armed forces can correct their mistakes, the war remains an example of supreme folly conducted with shameful brutality.”</p> <p>The Russian leader also ordered the invasion based on his view that democratic movements were preparing covert actions driven by U.S. and Western activities and information warfare.</p> <p>Mr. Putin also failed in his goal of making Russia a respected great power. Large-scale economic sanctions on Moscow are a disaster for the country and Russia’s international reputation is in tatters.</p> <p>“Even if he can win battles in Ukraine, the war has been a strategic failure from the start,” the report said.</p> <p>“Dysfunctionality” was the primary characteristic of the military operation from its earliest days, according to the report. Plans for a lightning assault on Kyiv called for first taking control of Hostomel Airport followed by an incursion of armored columns from Belarus. But quick military reactions and staunch resistance by the Ukrainians blocked both plans.</p> <p>“The expected blitzkrieg faltered as the Ukrainians destroyed vehicles at a significant rate along predictable routes,” the report said.</p> <p>Russian forces also were unable to resupply advancing troops and vehicles broke down and ran out of fuel. The multi-directional Russian invasion also lacked needed air defenses, close air support and electronic warfare tools. “The Russian army stalled despite a year of preparations, and the initial offensive failed,” the report said.</p>

Ukraine also won the information war in the West, fostering widespread international backing and opposition to Russia.

A key battle won by the Ukrainians involved troops near Chernihiv who blocked the capture of the main ground route to Kyiv for a week. And in Kharkiv, two Russian units that breached defenses and advanced into the city were nearly wiped out.

The Russian military also failed to use large-scale bombing and missile strikes in the opening of the offensive in the mistaken belief that Kyiv would fall easily without them. “Russia’s failure to use considerable firepower, except to create confusion, meant even the poorly prepared Ukrainian defenses, including air defenses, remained intact,” the report said.

Russian military formations called “battalion tactical groups” proved too weak to drive deep into Ukrainian territory and became easy targets for devastating Ukrainian counterattacks. Mr. Putin’s invasion plan to overrun all of Ukraine faltered from a lack of sufficient manpower to secure territorial gains.

“Russian prisoners and intercepted communications revealed they thought the Ukrainians would greet them as liberators,” the report said.

The report concludes that the Russians currently are racing against time in Ukraine to try to avoid an even more disastrous defeat.

“The deterioration of the Russian economy and the resupply of the Ukrainian resistance will strengthen over time, which means Putin is in a race to reduce major cities and take Kyiv, in particular, before the economic damage at home worsens,” the report said.

To counter the Russian strategy, the Ukrainians need to hold out and gain as much support from the West as possible, including air defenses, intelligence and financial backing.

“Stubbornly, Putin believes he can win in the face of setbacks,” the report says.

The Russians also fear NATO intervention and thus have stepped up nuclear threats against the West. Mr. Putin is trying to cow the West into submission, survive the economic pressure with Chinese assistance, and crush all internal opposition.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said this week the risks of nuclear conflict “now are considerable.”

The report describes as a “fantasy” Mr. Putin’s claims that he was fighting to prevent genocide against Russian speakers in Donbas, and dismisses his assertion that the operation seeks “de-Nazify” Ukraine because such sentiment is sparse and there is no evidence the country is under control of Nazis.

Mr. Johnson, who authored “Dysfunctional Warfare: The Russian Invasion of Ukraine 2022,” is a University of Oxford professor and director of the Oxford Changing Character of War Center.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Kitsap Co. schools pivot to remote learning
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/five-schools-in-kitsap-county-report-covid-19-outbreaks-as-bremerton-hs-pivots-to-remote-learning
GIST	BREMERTON, Wash. - White House medical adviser and infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci said the U.S. is " out of the pandemic phase " on Tuesday. However, the effects of COVID-19 caused some schools in western Washington to mask up once again, or even return to remote learning.

Students at Bremerton High School will begin learning from home Thursday and Friday. Bremerton School District said the high school is [experiencing a staff shortage](#), with several teachers calling out sick due to a "variety of illnesses, including COVID." Like other districts statewide, the challenge is there aren't enough substitute teachers to fill the absences. This forces the school to learn from home for the rest of the week.

[Kitsap Public Health District](#) talks with school districts every week about COVID-19 guidance and safe practices. The department's health officer, Dr. Gig Morrow, said five schools reported outbreaks across three districts this week. He said there has been an increase in cases across the county.

"Absolutely, cases are going up. We're seeing that not only with respect to illnesses, but additionally, we're seeing a drift up in terms hospitalizations, as well," said Morrow.

The school and district is following guidance from [Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) on temporary the shift to remote learning. When there is a health situation among groups of students, classrooms or entire schools, OSPI guidance says:

"It's the school district's responsibility to continue providing students with access to their learning even while they are quarantined and/or learning remotely. The guidance specifies that the learning must be synchronous (scheduled, real-time instruction) at least 70% of the time. The other 30% of the time should be asynchronous (prepared learning without two-way communication)."

Kitsap Public Health District is also part of the conversation when helping all schools learn the safest practices to protect students and staff from outbreaks. Morrow applauded schools throughout the county for stepping up testing options from the start.

"Some of them have contracted with private companies to help provide testing on-site. Others are doing it themselves. We've got a 'schools COVID response team' that we've built up internally, so we are there in the field providing technical assistance," said Morrow. "We've worked very, very closely with our superintendents, school administrators, their COVID teams as they make the best decisions for their school communities."

The plan is for Bremerton High School to resume class in person on Monday, after the district reevaluates staffing levels over the weekend. In the meantime, Morrow said let this be a lesson for all that COVID-19 is not over yet.

"I think that there are absolutely good solid reasons for some healthy optimism, which needs to be tempered with a hefty dose of caution," said Morrow.

Renton School District announced Dimmit Middle School is reinstating its facemask requirements, after a slight increase in COVID-19 cases. OSPI said requiring face masks again is a local decision made between the school, district and local health officer.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Special Olympics return; need help
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/special-olympics-return-are-back-but-organizers-need-your-help
GIST	<p>FEDERAL WAY, Wash. - The Special Olympics are back in Western Washington, but organizers say they are in need of hundreds of volunteers.</p> <p>This weekend is both the northwest (King County to Canada Border) and southwest (Oregon Border to Pierce County) regional qualifying events.</p> <p>On Saturday, athletes from the southwest region will compete in track and field events, as well as a soccer tournament at Mt. Tahoma High School in Tacoma.</p>

	<p>On Sunday, athletes from the northwest region will compete in events at the Marysville Pilchuck High School in Marysville.</p> <p>However, at least 150 volunteers are still needed for both Saturday and Sunday.</p> <p>Organizers think the reason turn out for volunteers is so low this year is due to the pandemic preventing in-person events for the last couple of seasons.</p> <p>Dave Remmem has coached his daughter's soccer team for the last nine years. He says it is worth the effort.</p> <p>"To see the joy in the athletes, I think, is heartwarming, and it definitely raises your spirits. And I think more people need to be involved in seeing that," said Remmem.</p> <p>Remmem's daughter, Amanda Sloan, says her nickname on the soccer field is "Animal".</p> <p>She says getting involved in the Special Olympics has helped her connect to other people in her community.</p> <p>"When I first started doing Special Olympics, I didn't know anyone. But then I started, I started making new friends with them," she said.</p> <p>No prior experience with either soccer or track and field is required for anyone wanting to get involved this weekend, and volunteers will be trained onsite.</p> <p>The minimum age for volunteering is 11 years old.</p>
Return to Top	<i>Anyone interested in volunteering can click here and preregister.</i>

HEADLINE	04/27 Flooded own village and kept Russia at bay
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-flood-infrastructure.html
GIST	<p>DEMYDIV, Ukraine — They pull up soggy linoleum from their floors, and fish potatoes and jars of pickles from submerged cellars. They hang out waterlogged rugs to dry in the pale spring sunshine.</p> <p>All around Demydiv, a village north of Kyiv, residents have been grappling with the aftermath of a severe flood, which under ordinary circumstances would have been yet another misfortune for a people under attack by Russia.</p> <p>This time, though, it was a tactical victory. The Ukrainians flooded the village intentionally, along with a vast expanse of fields and bogs around it, creating a quagmire that thwarted a Russian tank assault on Kyiv and bought the army precious time to prepare defenses.</p> <p>The residents of Demydiv paid the price in the rivers of dank green floodwater that engulfed many of their homes. And they couldn't be more pleased.</p> <p>"Everybody understands and nobody regrets it for a moment," said Antonina Kostuchenko, a retiree, whose living room is now a musty space with waterlines a foot or so up the walls.</p> <p>"We saved Kyiv!" she said with pride.</p> <p>What happened in Demydiv was not an outlier. Since the war's early days, Ukraine has been swift and effective in wreaking havoc on its own territory, often by destroying infrastructure, as a way to foil a Russian army with superior numbers and weaponry.</p> <p>Demydiv was flooded when troops opened a nearby dam and sent water surging into the countryside.</p>

Elsewhere in Ukraine, the military has, without hesitation, blown up bridges, bombed roads and disabled rail lines and airports. The goal has been to slow Russian advances, channel enemy troops into traps and force tank columns onto less favorable terrain.

So far, more than 300 bridges have been destroyed across Ukraine, the country's minister of infrastructure, Oleksandr Kubrakov, said. When the Russians tried to take a key airport outside Kyiv [on the first day of the invasion](#), Ukrainian forces shelled the runway, leaving them pockmarked with craters and unable to receive planeloads of Russian special forces.

The scorched-earth policy played an important role in Ukraine's success in holding off Russian forces in the north and preventing them from capturing Kyiv, the capital, military experts said.

"The Ukrainians are clearly being very creative in trying to make life very difficult for the Russians," said Rob Lee, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. "It makes sense to slow down any rapid offensive."

One approach, used often around Kyiv last month and in recent days in [the pitched combat in eastern Ukraine](#), is to force the Russians to attempt pontoon river crossings around destroyed bridges. Those sites are carefully plotted in advance by Ukrainian artillery teams, turning the pontoon bridgework into bloody, costly affairs for the Russians.

But variations abound. The Ukrainian military has released a video of a bridge blowing up as an armored vehicle lumbers across, sending the vehicle plummeting into the river.

To the east of Kyiv, bridges were blown up in a manner that forced a squad of Russian tanks into a peat bog; four tanks sank nearly up to their turrets.

"It has been one of the strong sides, everybody has taken note of this," Mr. Kubrakov said.

"Our army, our military has very properly used engineering items, whether dams or bridges they blew up, and stopped the advance of forces," he said. "It was done everywhere in the first days, and it is happening now in the Donbas" in eastern Ukraine.

The strategy comes at an enormous cost to the country's civilian infrastructure. The Russian army, too, has been blowing up bridges and targeting railroad stations, airports, fuel depots and other facilities, adding to Ukraine's self-inflicted damage and ballooning the price tag for rebuilding the country after the war.

The estimated total damage to transportation infrastructure after two months of war is about \$85 billion, the Ukrainian government has said. Regardless of which side actually destroyed any particular site, Mr. Kubrakov blamed Russia.

"We wouldn't have blown up our own bridges if the war hadn't started," Mr. Kubrakov said. "The cause is one and the same: aggression of the Russian Federation."

The experience in Demydiv is a case in point. Ukrainian forces flooded the area on Feb. 25, the second day of the war.

The move was particularly effective, Ukrainian officials and soldiers say, creating a sprawling, shallow lake in front of the Russian armored columns. Later, Russian shelling damaged the dam, complicating efforts now to drain the area.

Even two months later, residents of Demydiv paddled about in a rubber boat. Forlorn corn stalks emerged from flooded gardens. One family walked on a rickety pathway of boards over a sprawl of sticky black mud in their yard.

And yet a dozen or residents said in interviews that the strategic benefit outweighed their hardships.

“Fifty flooded houses isn’t a big loss,” said Volodymyr Artemchuk, a volunteer who was helping fuel the pumps now draining the village.

The flooding that blocked the northern rim of Kyiv on the west bank of the Dnipro River played a pivotal role in the fighting in March, as Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attempts to surround Kyiv and eventually drove the Russians into retreat. The waters created an effective barrier to tanks and funneled the assault force into ambushes and cramped, urban settings in a string of outlying towns — Hostomel, Bucha and Irpin.

The flood also limited potential crossing points over a tributary of the Dnipro, the Irpin River. In the end, Russian forces tried unsuccessfully a half-dozen times to cross that river, using a pontoon bridge and driving across a marshy area, all in unfavorable locations and under Ukrainian artillery fire.

They were repeatedly struck by shelling, according to a Ukrainian soldier named Denys who witnessed one failed crossing that left burned Russian tanks scattered on the riverbank. The soldier offered only his first name for security reasons.

The flood protected Kyiv but also helped protect Demydiv, which was on the Russian-occupied side of the flooded fields. Though Russian soldiers patrolled the village, it never became a front line in the battle, and was spared the grim fate of towns to the south.

Six people were shot during about a month of occupation, said Oleksandr Melnichenko, who holds a position akin to mayor, and houses and shops were destroyed by shelling. But the village escaped nightmarish scenes of dozens of bodies left on the streets by retreating Russian soldiers, as occurred in the frontline town of Bucha.

“Some people are trying to get back to normal life and some people are still traumatized,” Mr. Melnichenko said. “People are afraid it will happen again.”

Though some people complained about the sluggish cleanup, which is expected to take weeks or months, much of the village has banded together in almost joyous communal effort to dry out their homes.

Even as the floodwater swamped backyards and soda bottles floated past houses, women were stewing borscht and inviting people in to eat, and neighbors ferried diesel fuel for pumps in a rubber boat.

Roman Bykhovchenko, 60, a security guard, was drying soggy shoes on a table in his yard. When he walked in his kitchen, water bubbled up through cracks in the floorboards. Still, he said of the damage, “It was worth it.”

Ms. Kostuchenko, the retiree, apologized for the heaps of towels strewn on the floor as she displayed the damage to her house. “I’m sorry it’s so messy,” she said.

She sighed, lamenting that her garden, now a shallow pond, was unlikely to be planted this year. But then she joked that perhaps she would try growing rice.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Fears: Ukraine war spills across borders
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/us/politics/ukraine-war-expansion.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — For nine weeks, President Biden and the Western allies have emphasized the need to keep the war for Ukraine inside Ukraine.</p> <p>Now, the fear in Washington and European capitals is that the conflict may soon escalate into a wider war — spreading to neighboring states, to cyberspace and to NATO countries suddenly facing a Russian cutoff</p>

of gas. Over the long term, such an expansion could evolve into a more direct conflict between Washington and Moscow reminiscent of the Cold War, as each seeks to sap the other's power.

In the past three days, the American secretary of defense has called for an effort to degrade the capability of the Russian military so that it could not invade another country for years to come. The Russians have cut off gas shipments to Poland and Bulgaria, which joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization after the collapse of the Soviet Union; Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, immediately denounced the move as an "instrument of blackmail." Explosions have rocked a disputed area of Moldova, a natural next target for the Russians, and gas depots and even a missile factory in Russia have mysteriously caught fire or come under direct attack from Ukrainian forces.

And with increasing frequency, the Russians are reminding the world of the size and power of their nuclear arsenal, an unobvious warning that if President Vladimir V. Putin's conventional forces face any more humiliating losses, he has other options. American and European officials say they see no evidence the Russians are mobilizing their battlefield nuclear forces, but behind the scenes, the officials are already gaming out how they might react to a Russian nuclear test, or demonstration explosion, over the Black Sea or on Ukrainian territory.

"Nobody wants to see this war escalate any more than it already has," John Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, said on Wednesday when asked about Russia's nuclear threats. "Certainly nobody wants to see, or nobody should want to see, it escalate into the nuclear realm."

American and European officials say their fears are based in part on the growing conviction that the conflict could "go on for some time," as Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken put it recently.

Talk of a diplomatic resolution or even a cease-fire — attempted at various points by the leaders of France, Israel and Turkey, among others — has died out. Both Ukrainian and Russian forces are digging in for the long haul, focusing on what they expect will be an artillery war in the south and east of the country, where Russia has focused its forces after a humiliating retreat from Kyiv and other key cities.

"Putin is not willing to back down, nor are the Ukrainians, so there is more blood to come," said Robin Niblett, the director of Chatham House, a British think tank. At the same time, American and European determination to help Ukraine defeat the Russians has hardened, partly after the atrocities in Bucha and other towns occupied by the Russians became clear, with even Germany overcoming its initial objections and sending artillery and armored vehicles.

Seth G. Jones, who directs the European Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, said on Wednesday that "the risk of a widening war is serious right now."

"Russian casualties are continuing to mount, and the U.S. is committed to shipping more powerful weapons that are causing those casualties," Mr. Jones said. Sooner or later, he added, Russia's military intelligence service might begin to target those weapons shipments inside NATO's borders.

Not all lines of communication between Washington and Moscow have collapsed. The U.S. and Russia announced a prisoner swap early on Wednesday. The exchange took place secretly in Turkey, where Trevor Reed, a former Marine, was swapped for a Russian pilot whom the Justice Department had long called "an experienced international drug trafficker." But even that had a return-to-the-Cold-War air about it, highlighting how much of the current conflict is also a power struggle between Washington and Moscow.

The moment seemed to reinforce the argument that Stephen Kotkin, a professor at Princeton University and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford, made in Foreign Affairs recently when he wrote that "the original Cold War's end was a mirage," as the effort to integrate Russia into the West slowly collapsed.

Mr. Biden himself has endorsed the theory that Mr. Putin has designs that go beyond Ukraine. The invasion, he said on the day it began, Feb. 24, was “always about naked aggression, about Putin’s desire for empire by any means necessary.”

But so far, the war has stayed largely within the geographical confines of Ukraine. The United States and its allies said their goal was to get Russia to withdraw its forces “irreversibly,” as Mr. Blinken put it, and respect Ukraine’s borders as they existed before the invasion. Mr. Biden declined to impose a no-fly zone that would pit American and Russian pilots against each other. Mr. Putin denounced the influx of Western weapons to help the Ukrainian military, but has never attacked those supply lines inside NATO territory.

Now, there are signs that the restraint is fracturing.

When Gazprom, the Russian energy giant, cut off the flow to Poland and Bulgaria, it was clearly a warning sign that Germany — hugely dependent on Russian gas — could be next. Russia was using its most potent economic weapon, sending a message that it could bring pain and, next winter, considerable cold to Eastern and Western Europe without firing a shot. American officials said it was clearly an effort to fragment the NATO allies, who have so far remained united.

Coincidentally or not, Mr. Putin’s move came just after Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III went beyond the administration’s oft-repeated statement that it wanted to make sure Russia emerged from its Ukraine experience strategically weakened.

“We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,” Mr. Austin said, a line that seemed to suggest the U.S. wanted to erode Russian military power for years — presumably as long as Mr. Putin remains in power. The export controls the U.S. has imposed on key microelectronic components Russia needs to produce its missiles and tanks appear designed to do just that.

Some Europeans wondered whether Washington’s war aims had broadened from helping Ukraine to defend itself, which has broad support, to damaging Russia itself, a controversial goal that would feed into a Russian narrative that Moscow’s actions in Ukraine are to defend itself against NATO.

Some administration officials insist Mr. Austin’s comments were overinterpreted, and that he was not suggesting a long-term strategic goal of undermining Russian power. Instead, they say, he was just amplifying past statements about the need to sharpen the choices facing Mr. Putin — while setting back Russia’s ability to launch another invasion once it regroups.

But many in Europe thought his statement suggested a long war of attrition that could have many fronts.

“Are we headed for a wider war or is this just a gaffe by Austin?” asked François Heisbourg, a French defense analyst.

“There is a widening consensus about supplying Ukraine howitzers and more complex weapons systems, and everyone is now doing that,” Mr. Heisbourg noted.

“But it’s another thing to pivot the war aim from Ukraine to Russia. I don’t believe there’s any consensus on that.” Weakening Russia’s military capacity “is a good thing to do,” Mr. Heisbourg said, “but it’s a means to an end, not an end in itself.”

There are other factors that risk broadening the conflict. Within weeks, Sweden and Finland are expected to seek entry into NATO — expanding the alliance in reaction to Mr. Putin’s efforts to break it up. But the process could take months because each NATO country would have to ratify the move, and that could open a period of vulnerability. Russia could threaten both countries before they are formally accepted into the alliance and are covered by the NATO treaty that stipulates an attack on one member is an attack on all.

	<p>But there is less and less doubt that Sweden and Finland will become the 31st and 32nd members of the alliance. Mr. Niblett said a new expansion of NATO — just what Mr. Putin has been objecting to for the last two decades — would “make explicit the new front lines of the standoff with Russia.”</p> <p>Not surprisingly, both sides are playing on the fear that the war could spread, in propaganda campaigns that parallel the ongoing war on the ground. President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine frequently raises the possibility in his evening radio addresses; two weeks ago, imploring NATO allies for more arms, he argued that “we can either stop Russia or lose the whole of Eastern Europe.”</p> <p>Russia has its own handbook, episodically arguing that its goals go beyond “denazification” of Ukraine to the removal of NATO forces and weapons from allied countries that did not host either before 1997. Moscow’s frequent references to the growing risk of nuclear war seem intended to drive home the point that the West should not push too far.</p> <p>That message resonates in Germany, which has long sought to avoid provoking Mr. Putin, said Ulrich Speck, a German analyst. To say that “Russia must not win,” he said, is different from saying “Russia must lose.”</p> <p>There is a concern in Berlin that “we shouldn’t push Putin too hard against the wall,” Mr. Speck said, “so that he may become desperate and do something truly irresponsible.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Ukraine striking targets deeper in Russia?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/27/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#explosions-and-downed-drones-suggest-ukraine-is-striking-targets-deeper-inside-russia
GIST	<p>Ukraine appears to have attempted to strike deeper into Russian territory overnight, although officials on both sides were being reticent about drone flights and explosions early Wednesday that were described by three local governors in Russia.</p> <p>A close adviser to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said that the assaults inside Russia near Ukraine’s eastern border were payback against launching pads for the invasion, but he stopped short of saying the Ukrainian military was responsible, attributing the attacks to “karma” instead.</p> <p>In Russia, three governors described incidents involving drones or blasts on their territories. An ammunition depot was set on fire near Belgorod, a city less than 20 miles from the border. Two explosions were reported in Voronezh, nearly 200 miles from Ukraine, and a Ukrainian drone was reportedly shot down over Kursk, about 70 miles from the border.</p> <p>The attacks in Kursk and Voronezh, where air-defense systems were reportedly activated, raised the specter of a wider war, as they were farther inside Russia than previous targets.</p> <p>Ukraine’s defense ministry has generally declined to discuss reports of attacks on Russian soil. In two months of war, the fighting has largely been contained within Ukraine’s borders, though Russia claims that two Ukrainian helicopters fired on an oil depot in Belgorod in early April.</p> <p>Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Mr. Zelensky and a member of the Ukrainian delegation to the stalled peace talks, wrote in Russian on his channel on the Telegram chat app that warehouses in regions like Belgorod and Voronezh were being used to supply fuel for armed vehicles in Ukraine. Disarming them, he wrote, was “a very natural process,” adding, “Karma is a cruel thing.”</p> <p>“If you (Russians) decided to attack another country in its entirety, to kill everyone there indiscriminately, to crush civilians with tanks and use warehouses in your regions to provide for your killings, then sooner or later you will have to pay the debt,” Mr. Podolyak wrote.</p>

In Belgorod, where the ammunition depot caught fire, no homes were damaged and there were no civilian casualties, the governor, Vyacheslav Gladkov, wrote on his Telegram channel.

Roman Starovoit, the regional governor for Kursk, also used his Telegram channel to announce that a Ukrainian drone was shot down over the city, but that there was no damage and no casualties.

The governor of Voronezh, Alexander Gusev, made a similar announcement, saying that air defenses had successfully detected and destroyed a small reconnaissance drone, without specifying whether it was Ukrainian. The official TASS news agency reported that two “loud blasts” were heard in Voronezh.

In Moscow, Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary for President Vladimir V. Putin’s security council, urged officials from across a wide swath of the southwestern region near Ukraine to make sure the systems to issue emergency alerts for the civilian population as well as civil defense facilities were “working reliably.”

Bomb shelters and other physical infrastructure should remain under the control of federal officials and not be sold off, he said.

The blasts come after other explosions and fires were reported in recent days in Russian regions near Ukraine’s northeastern border, as well as in Transnistria, a Moscow-backed separatist sliver of Moldova, to Ukraine’s southwest.

On Monday, fires engulfed oil depots in Bryansk, Russia, a key logistical hub for Russia’s military, destroying one tank at a civilian oil storage facility and another at a military oil depot.

On Tuesday, James Heappey, a British junior defense minister, said in a radio interview that Ukraine would be justified in attacking targets inside Russia to defend itself.

“It’s completely legitimate for Ukraine to be targeting in Russia’s depth in order to disrupt the logistics that, if they weren’t disrupted, would directly contribute to death and carnage on Ukrainian soil,” he told Times Radio.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Strategy shift: Russia slows advances
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/27/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#in-a-strategy-shift-russia-is-making-slow-advances-in-eastern-ukraine-analysts-say
GIST	<p>Russia is making slow and measured advances on the ground in eastern Ukraine as its forces confront entrenched Ukrainian troops who have been fortifying their positions for almost a decade, military analysts say.</p> <p>The slower pattern of movement marks a significant departure from Moscow’s initial invasion in February, which depended on swift advances of tanks deep into Ukraine — a strategy that failed and came at a great cost to Russia’s ground forces.</p> <p>Military analysts with the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said in their most recent assessment on Tuesday that “Russian forces have adopted a sounder pattern of operational movement in eastern Ukraine,” which is allowing them to “bring more combat power to bear” in their narrower goal of capturing the region.</p> <p>Russia continues to rely on heavy air bombardments as it amasses troops and weaponry for a bigger push along the front line, according to the British Defense Ministry’s latest intelligence update on Wednesday.</p> <p>Russian ground forces have continued to make advances south of the city of Izium, which they seized last month, along two parallel roads heading toward a pair of strategic villages, Barvinkoe and Sloviansk, according to the ISW. The aim of parallel advances in the east, the assessment said, is likely to create a</p>

land corridor with the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, so that Moscow can merge its forces with Russia-backed separatists in the region.

The Russians may also use the advances below Iziom to achieve a "deep encirclement" of Ukrainian forces in the east, the report said. But it is unclear if Russian troops, who are facing fatigue and low morale after their defeats in central Ukraine, are "strong enough to accomplish such a task," the report said.

Ukrainian troops have been defending positions in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since 2014, when secessionists there, backed by Russia, declared themselves the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic.

Russia's success on the ground near Iziom could be largely attributed to a weak spot in Ukrainian defenses around the city of Kharkiv, to the west of the front line, where Ukrainian troops are fewer and less prepared to defend their positions, the ISW said.

Beyond the front line, Russia pressed on with its assault across southern and eastern regions of Ukraine on Tuesday with attacks in Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro and Mykolaiv, according to the ISW and local officials.

In the region of Kharkiv, a series of overnight strikes on a constellation of towns killed three people and wounded 15, the region's governor said in a Telegram post on Wednesday.

In the besieged city of Mariupol, Russian forces have not stopped their bombardment, relying heavily on "unguided free-falling bombs" to indiscriminately target infrastructure, at great risk to the civilians who remain there, the British Defense Ministry said.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Fauci clarifies: pandemic not yet over
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/27/world/covid-19-mandates-vaccine-cases#though-the-virus-persists-fauci-says-the-us-right-now-is-out-of-the-pandemic-phase
GIST	<p>Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, said on Wednesday that the pandemic was not yet over, after telling the "PBS NewsHour" on Tuesday that the United States was "out of the pandemic phase."</p> <p>He offered clarification on NPR's "1A" on Wednesday, saying: "I want to clarify one thing. I probably should have said the acute component of the pandemic phase. And I understand how that can lead to some misinterpretation."</p> <p>In comments to PBS and The Washington Post this week, Dr. Fauci had said that the country had entered a new phase of the pandemic, because daily counts of confirmed new cases, hospitalizations and deaths were far lower than during the Omicron surge over the winter.</p> <p>On "PBS NewsHour," Dr. Fauci noted that "we don't have 900,000 new infections a day and tens and tens and tens of thousands of hospitalizations and thousands of deaths."</p> <p>And he told The Washington Post on Wednesday, "We're really in a transitional phase, from a deceleration of the numbers into hopefully a more controlled phase and endemicity."</p> <p>In an interview with The Associated Press, also on Wednesday, he said that while the country was in a different phase of the pandemic, there was more work to do: "By no means does that mean the pandemic is over."</p> <p>He called for more vaccinations and boosters shots, and better access to treatments.</p>

“We can’t take our foot off the pedal,” Dr. Fauci said. “There’s a lot of viral dynamics throughout the world, and we still may get another variant which could lead to another potential surge.”

The White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, [told reporters](#) on Wednesday that Dr. Fauci’s comments about being in a different phase of the pandemic are “absolutely true,” but that “we also know Covid isn’t over.”

On Tuesday, other federal health officials reported sweeping findings about the spread of the coronavirus: Some 60 percent of Americans have antibodies indicating that they were infected with the virus at least once, [the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported](#).

Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House’s Covid coordinator, [said at a news briefing on Tuesday](#) that completely stopping new infections was “not even a policy goal,” and that he thought the administration should instead concentrate on preventing serious illness while minimizing infections.

The average number of confirmed new cases reported daily in the United States has risen 61 percent in the past two weeks. More than 50,000 new cases were reported on Tuesday, according to a [New York Times database](#).

Dr. Fauci said on Tuesday that he believed that even that reported increase was an undercount, because more people are turning to at-home testing and many have no way to report the results.

Tracking new cases [has become more difficult](#) since the Omicron peak, with the country [recording a steep decrease in P.C.R. testing](#). But Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, the C.D.C.’s director, said the national statistics reflected “a true and reliable drop in our overall cases.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the World Health Organization, warned at a [news briefing](#) on Tuesday that it would be difficult to track the evolution of the coronavirus if countries did not maintain consistent testing.

“When it comes to the deadly virus, ignorance is not a bliss,” he said.

Many countries around the world have loosened pandemic restrictions in recent months and switched to an approach of tolerating the virus’s continued presence, while others — notably China — have continued to try to stamp it out entirely.

The European Union issued a statement on Wednesday that seemed akin to Dr. Fauci’s remarks, saying that the bloc was [moving out of the “emergency phase” of the pandemic](#). The E.U. said it would focus on vaccination, surveillance and testing to prepare for the possibility of a new wave of infections in the fall.

China, by contrast, has been trying to achieve “zero Covid” in the country, but virus outbreaks continue to rage there. Officials in Beijing are [trying to test most of the city’s 22 million residents](#) in an effort to avoid imposing a citywide lockdown like the one that [has disrupted life in Shanghai](#) for weeks.

In Washington, the annual [White House Correspondents’ Dinner](#) will be held on Saturday for the first time since 2019, and 2,600 politicians, journalists and officials are expected to attend. Dr. Fauci, 81, will not be there, he said, “because of my individual assessment of my personal risk.”

With the virus racing through the Biden administration and [Vice President Kamala Harris testing positive on Tuesday](#), President Biden, 79, made his own risk assessment of the dinner in consultation with his doctors. He is expected to attend and “showcase his support for the free press,” Ms. Psaki said, but he will not eat at the event and may wear a mask when he is not speaking.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Fallout: Seattle stumbles on homelessness
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/more-fallout-from-seattles-stumbles-on-homelessness/

John Pehrson called the other day with some bad news. Bad in more ways than one.

“We’re giving up,” the former rocket scientist said, marking a first for him with that phrase.

Pehrson had co-led a group of volunteer retirees who, for the past year, had raised \$143,000 for a homelessness aid project in their South Lake Union neighborhood.

But due to a [spider web of mixed signals and finger-pointing, foot-dragging bureaucracies](#), the project – a 40-home tiny house village – is “obviously not going to happen,” Pehrson says.

“We can’t dribble on forever like the city,” he said.

The charitable foundation for the Mirabella retirement center, where the money was raised, has decided to end the volunteers’ involvement and return all the donations.

“We were not able to execute on what we asked everyone to donate to, so we’re obligated to give the money back,” said Pehrson, a former manager at Boeing’s Kent Space Center. “It’s terribly frustrating. No homeless people got helped.”

The office of Mayor Bruce Harrell had pledged to look for a site in South Lake Union, after the first one, a City Light property, had fallen through. But Pehrson said “they never got back to us, and with the politics around tiny home villages right now, we could see the writing on the wall.”

He was referring to my column this past weekend on how there’s a brand-new tiny house village sitting empty and unused in Rainier Beach, due to squabbling among the nonprofit that built it, the city and the new Regional Homelessness Authority (who rejected funding for both the Rainier Beach and Mirabella projects).

Though the CEO of the authority, Marc Dones, said the RHA has no ax to grind with tiny homes as shelter, Anne Martens, the RHA’s senior director of external affairs and communications, wrote to me over the weekend calling them “shantytowns.”

“New York has a multibillion dollar shelter industry because they invested in shelter but not in housing,” she wrote, about why the RHA didn’t fund the Rainier Beach or Mirabella proposals. “I don’t think scaling up shantytowns is the answer.”

The tiny house village I visited at Rainier Beach has heat and power. Supervision and case counselors are available for its residents. There are beds with linen, a laundry, and bathrooms with shower facilities. Even a kitchen with free meals and 24/7 security.

My interest in these villages was because I saw firsthand how people who may reject other forms of emergency shelter will often be amenable to moving into a tiny house.

The ultimate goal has to be permanent housing, as Martens says. But as a step for helping people out of the worst conditions, tiny homes seem to work, according to a new, two-year study of them at Portland State University.

All that said, if tiny homes are now on the out in Seattle, then: What’s in? If we’re going to nix this option, we need something in its place.

But neither the city nor the RHA is rapidly standing up some other type of transitional shelter. Mayor Harrell pledged during his campaign to add 1,000 new shelter units in the first six months of this year. So far, according to the City Council’s homelessness committee, the number added has been zero.

Without transitional shelter, it means, by default, that we’re choosing to leave people on the streets and under bridges during the many, many years it will take to build apartment buildings.

	<p>Jenny Cummins, who helps Epiphany Church in Seattle with volunteer efforts, said there's great confusion right now on what leaders even want.</p> <p>"We have money and people hours to donate, but people lose heart if in the end they get blocked," she said. "If it's not this, then what is the plan instead? Tell us and we'll do that."</p> <p>Example: Volunteers continue to gather most days in a warehouse in SODO to churn out more tiny houses. Somebody up the chain should let them know if those efforts are going to prove fruitless.</p> <p>Pehrson said he's worried that in this leadership vacuum, fatalism may set in.</p> <p>"When people see failure like this, they may be less likely to jump up and try to help in the future," he said.</p> <p>He's talking about a concept called "doomism." The feeling that a problem is so intractable or unworkable, people no longer see a point in trying.</p> <p>My own view has usually veered closer to doomism's unhelpful opposite, "hopeium." That's unfounded optimism – a sense that it can't possibly be this difficult for Seattle to house people.</p> <p>Clear-eyed, forthright, coordinated leadership on this issue of our time is what is desperately needed. But I'm feeling like calling for that may be just another act of hopeium.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 April in Seattle coldest in years; for May?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/weather/seattle-has-had-its-coldest-april-in-years-what-does-that-mean-for-may/ https://www.seattletimes.com/life/outdoors/colder-april-means-a-longer-ski-season-as-several-resorts-stay-open-into-may/
GIST	<p>If it feels like winter weather is lingering in the Seattle area and it's taking longer than usual to warm up, that's because it is.</p> <p>While the month is not over just yet, it's on track to be the third-coldest April in Seattle over the last 45 years and the 13th-coldest ever, according to the National Weather Service of Seattle.</p> <p>Overall, the average temperature this April has been 46.5 degrees, compared with our typical 51-degree average. This year, April 13 tied for the coldest April day on record at 38 degrees, according to meteorologist Dustin Guy.</p> <p>And though this month's chilly temperatures don't directly indicate next month's, the influence of La Niña remains, said meteorologist Dana Felton.</p> <p>La Niña tends to bring cooler and wetter weather. This is our second consecutive La Niña year.</p> <p>So far, this month's rainfall is slightly below normal, with Seattle receiving 2.18 inches, with 2.85 inches the usual average. However, heavy rain coming later this week could bring the total up, said Guy.</p> <p>"And we've got a decent weather system coming in Friday into Saturday morning that may not make up all the ground but will get us closer to normal," he said.</p> <hr/> <p>After a colder than average April coupled with copious mountain snow, most ski resorts in the Cascades are pushing the season into May. This coming weekend will be the final call at Mission Ridge, Stevens Pass, The Summit at Snoqualmie and White Pass. (Mount Baker Ski Area is closed for the season.)</p>

Return to Top	<p>Crystal Mountain Resort will go even further into May and spin lifts on weekends with closing day scheduled for Memorial Day on May 30.</p> <p>“With a later start to the season we are excited to be able to extend the ski season,” said Tiana Anderson, vice president of marketing & sales, in a statement. “We are in the business of operating lifts for skiing and snowboarding so when the opportunity comes along to extend the season, we will always prioritize that and continue to provide added value to our season pass holders.”</p> <p>At Stevens Pass, closing day on Sunday, May 1, will see the return of popular events like Springfest, which will feature live music and a pondskim, where skiers and snowboarders celebrate the end of the season by braving a run that transitions from snow onto water as they attempt to cross a pond without falling in. (Spoiler alert: Lots of people fall in.)</p> <p>The Summit at Snoqualmie will open Alpentel on Friday through Sunday, with Summit Central spinning lifts on Saturday and Sunday. Thanks to the healthy late-season snowpack, this will be the first season in decades that Summit Central stays open as late as Alpentel. Sunday is only open to season passholders. No day tickets will be sold and Ikon Passes will not be honored.</p> <p>While the winter that wouldn’t quit is wrapping up, season passes are on sale for next season and prices are increasing as the calendar advances. The Ikon Pass, which provides access to Crystal Mountain and The Summit at Snoqualmie, went up by \$100 on April 22. The Epic Pass, which includes Stevens Pass Ski Area, increased in price for next season, but season passes for Stevens only will not cost more.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Dynasty bankrupts Sri Lanka in 30mo.
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/a-powerful-dynasty-bankrupted-sri-lanka-in-just-30-months/
GIST	<p>Bloomberg - Before the November 2019 election, Sri Lankan presidential challenger Gotabaya Rajapaksa proposed sweeping tax cuts so reckless the incumbent government thought it must be a campaign gimmick.</p> <p>The finance minister at the time, Mangala Samaraweera, called a briefing to assail the “dangerous” pledge to reduce the value-added tax to 8% from 15% and scrap other levies. To him, it was simple math: Sri Lanka collected relatively less revenue than nearly any other country, and its high debt load had forced it to seek cash from the International Monetary Fund.</p> <p>“If these proposals are implemented like this not only will the entire country go bankrupt,” the minister warned, “but the entire country will become another Venezuela or another Greece.”</p> <p>It took about 30 months for his prediction to come true, in what’s become a cautionary tale for populist leaders navigating through a world of war, disease and high inflation.</p> <p>After Rajapaksa won the 2019 election, reviving one of Asia’s most powerful dynasties, he passed the tax cut immediately in his first cabinet meeting. He then quickly restored presidential powers held during the 10-year rule of his strongman brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, a period that saw the family end a nearly three-decade civil war before getting voted out in 2015 by a citizenry wary of increased oppression and indebtedness to China.</p> <p>Instead of learning to govern with more humility, Rajapaksa rushed to restore the family’s brand of populist authoritarianism laced with appeals to nationalism among Sinhalese Buddhists, who make up 75% of the population.</p> <p>But that strategy quickly backfired. In recent weeks Sri Lanka ran out of cash to pay for essential goods like food and fuel, leading to long petrol lines and daily 13-hour power cuts.irate citizens burned loaves of bread and ransacked the health ministry to find medicine. Protesters have camped outside the president’s office in downtown Colombo for weeks to demand his resignation.</p>

The Rajapaksa family now is in full damage control mode, racing to ensure basic goods for the citizenry while seeking emergency funds from the IMF, World Bank, China and other lenders. It has stopped paying back foreign debt, defaulting for the first time since achieving independence from the British in 1948. The country's stock exchange, which had soared after the tax cuts, is the world's worst performer this year — below even Russia.

What's more, the Rajapaksas have also been forced to retreat on the two major policies it implemented after the 2019 election. Finance Minister Ali Sabry said the value-added tax must rise for Sri Lanka to shore up its finances, and the Rajapaksas have offered to roll back presidential powers as opponents seek to impeach Gotabaya as president and remove Mahinda as prime minister.

"The Rajapaksas are withdrawing, but that doesn't mean they're going to surrender," said Jehan Perera, a newspaper columnist and the executive director of the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, an independent advocacy group. "The Rajapaksas are afraid that if they go, they'll be very vulnerable both in and outside the country. They face human rights violations, accusations of war crimes, and corruption charges."

For 12 of the last 20 years, members of the Rajapaksa family have controlled the highest reaches of Sri Lanka's government. Under their watch, critics in the opposition and the media have called Sri Lanka a "soft dictatorship" and described the Rajapaksas as characters like those conjured up by Mario Puzo, who wrote the screenplay for "The Godfather."

Gotabaya, 72, a former defense chief, led a deadly final push to end the war against Tamil separatists, which killed as many as 100,000 people before a cease-fire in 2009. His brother, Mahinda, 76, the family's political brain, has served as president and twice as prime minister. Two other siblings, Chamal, 79, and Basil, 71, carved out niches managing ports, agriculture and money. Dozens of relatives hold top posts.

Milinda Rajapaksha, a government spokesperson, declined to comment for this article.

Namal Rajapaksa — the president's nephew, who recently resigned as sports minister — said that while the government had inherited a bad economy from the previous administration, it also made some key policy errors and failed to pivot quickly when the pandemic hit. The tax cuts, he said, should've been adjusted after a year because the government was losing revenue and not reaping the investment expected from local investors.

"There were certain decisions that we did not agree on as a political party when it comes to implementation," Namal Rajapaksa said by phone, adding that the administration should've been more transparent and taken time to educate the public on the challenges. "I don't blame the public for blaming the Rajapaksa-led government because they are in power. The government is in power, so the government is responsible."

"The current situation is purely based on the breakdown of the supply chain and governance," he added. "The president has to take decisions, firmly, and govern the country. And also get the institutions back on track."

Even before the Rajapaksas took power, the country was in financial trouble. During the family's first stint in office, the government took out big loans from China to invest in projects like a deep-sea port in its home district of Hambantota on the island's southern coastline, part of an effort to turn the nation into a South Asian version of Singapore. But many projects stalled and foreign debt more than doubled between 2010 and 2020.

On top of that, the country was still reeling from terrorist attacks on Easter Sunday in 2019, when suicide bombers linked to the Islamic State killed more than 250 people in strikes on churches and luxury hotels. The pervasive fear prompted voters to rally behind the candidate with experience crushing insurgencies: Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

“There was this assumption that the way out of the post-Easter Sunday slump was tax cuts and low-interest rates,” said Anushka Wijesinha, an economist and former adviser to the government’s ministry of international trade and development. “It was a mistake.”

Fears of a broader meltdown first emerged with the pandemic, which suddenly sapped revenue from tourism and remittances. Credit rating companies downgraded Sri Lanka. To stay afloat, the government printed money, boosting supply by 42% between December 2019 and August 2021 — helping to stoke what would become Asia’s fastest inflation.

Last April, Sri Lanka suffered another shock: the government abruptly banned chemical fertilizer imports. In public, officials framed the move as delivering on a campaign promise to embrace organic farming and fight the “fertilizer mafia.” In reality, many saw the decision as an attempt to save dollars, according to Wijesinha and other economists. Namal Rajapaksa said the timing of the fertilizer decision was a point of disagreement within the ruling party.

The ban backfired. Sri Lanka’s entire agricultural chain — around a third of the labor force and 8% of gross domestic product — faced disruptions. The paddy harvest failed, forcing the government to import rice and start an expensive food aid program to support devastated farmers. Export earnings from tea, a key revenue source, also dried up. In November, as protests flared, the government partially reversed the ban.

“So many experts came forward and said this is a disastrous policy that will affect food security,” said Dhananath Fernando, the chief operating officer of Advocata, an economic policy research group. “But unfortunately, the government was hellbent on its decision.”

The policy mistakes led to shortages of food, electricity and medicine for the poor, and soon prompted angry protesters to hit the streets yelling “Go home Gota!” and “Gota is a madman!” The Rajapaksas lost their two-thirds majority in parliament as coalition members defected, and they’re now trying to withstand the opposition’s efforts to remove them from power.

While the current financial troubles make an election difficult to hold at the moment, opinion surveys suggest the Rajapaksas would lose in a landslide. The first “Mood of the Nation” poll carried out in January by Verite Research showed that the government’s approval rating stood at just 10%.

The Rajapaksa government is “testing our level of patience and perseverance,” said Malik Nazahim, 24, who’s attended several demonstrations. “That’s what’s pushing us forward. We want change and we want it now.”

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HEADLINE	04/27 Minneapolis PD engages in racist policing
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/us/minneapolis-police-racism-human-rights.html
GIST	<p>The Minneapolis Police Department routinely engages in multiple forms of racially discriminatory policing, fails to hold officers accountable for misconduct and has used fake social media accounts to target Black people and organizations, according to a damning investigation released Wednesday by the Minnesota Department of Human Rights.</p> <p>The Police Department has a “culture that is averse to oversight and accountability,” and city and department leaders have failed to act with “the necessary urgency, coordination, and intentionality required” to correct its problems, the investigation concluded.</p> <p>The Minneapolis police have been under intense scrutiny since cellphone cameras captured the murder of George Floyd, a Black man, by a police officer during an arrest May 25, 2020. The state’s human rights investigation began about a week later. The department is under a similar investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice.</p>

Both investigations could result in consent decrees, agreements that are overseen by monitors and enforced by the courts. Such agreements generally include a long list of required changes, bench marks and timelines. The state human rights department is seeking public comment on what such a consent decree should include.

Its investigation found that officers stopped, searched, arrested, ticketed, used force on and killed Black and Indigenous people at a higher rate than white people. Although Black individuals make up approximately 19% of the population, in 10 years of data, 63% of the instances in which officers recorded the use of force were against Black people, the report said.

The department did not have enough data to look at treatment of other racial and ethnic groups, state Human Rights Commissioner Rebecca Lucero said at a news conference.

Investigators reviewed 700 hours of body camera footage, finding that officers and supervisors used racist, misogynistic and disrespectful language to suspects, witnesses, bystanders — and to one another. The report provides an exhaustive list of slurs that officers used against women and Black people.

The disrespect was so flagrant that local prosecutors said it was difficult to present body camera videos to juries, according to the report. “When MPD officers scream obscenities at community members, it makes it challenging for prosecutors to do their job.”

Officers used “covert social media accounts,” which the report said were “unrelated to any actual or alleged criminal activity,” to observe and engage with elected officials, Black individuals and organizations, sometimes posing as community members to engage or comment. In one instance, the report said, an officer posed as a Black resident to send a message criticizing the NAACP.

Floyd was killed after two rookie officers responded to a call that he had tried to use a counterfeit \$20 bill at a convenience store. Floyd declined to get into the squad car. A field training officer, Derek Chauvin, and his partner arrived to provide backup. Chauvin forced Floyd to the pavement and knelt on his neck for more than nine minutes, while his partner stood guard and the two rookies helped pin Floyd down.

Chauvin was convicted of murder and pleaded guilty to federal civil rights violations. The three other officers have been convicted of failure to intervene or provide medical aid and still face state charges of aiding and abetting murder and manslaughter.

Although field training officers like Chauvin have tremendous sway over rookies, the department does not offer ongoing instruction for them, the investigation found — an oversight that it said “furthers race-based policing.” It cited a 2020 case in which a training officer allowed a trainee to search a Black woman who was unarmed, but said that searching an intoxicated white man who admitted to having a knife in his bag would be a waste of the trainee’s time.

The investigation found that the department still fails to empower officers to intervene when they see something wrong. On the first day of training in 2021, the report said, recruits were told that “instant and unquestioned compliance is in order.”

That attitude trickles down — MPD officers demand unquestioned compliance in “even the most banal interactions,” community members told investigators. More than 2,000 residents were interviewed.

Since the 2021 academy class, the department has begun peer-intervention training for all officers.

Mayor Jacob Frey and the police department have touted numerous policy changes since the killing of Floyd, including banning chokeholds and neck restraints and updating the department’s use-of-force policy.

	<p>But officers reported that they in some cases had to wait a year or more to hear the details. In the case of the new use-of-force policy, which includes the new limits on restraints, investigators found that officers were provided with only a 15-minute “narrated PowerPoint presentation” on the changes.</p> <p>The department lacks accountability measures from top to bottom, the investigators found. They said more than one-third of officers who are referred for coaching, the least severe form of intervention, do not receive it, and that supervisors fail to flag excessive uses of force.</p> <p>The report cited a 2017 case in which an officer hit an unarmed 14-year-old in his bedroom with a flashlight and choked him until he lost consciousness, all because the teenager did not stand up quickly when ordered to do so. A supervisor approved the officer’s actions.</p> <p>The report said the entities responsible for investigating misconduct often fail to review body camera footage, or give deference to officers over witnesses. It said that the department’s internal affairs unit handled one-quarter of complaints improperly, and the Office of Police Conduct Review, which includes civilian investigators, mishandled half of the complaints it investigated.</p> <p>As of midafternoon Wednesday, neither the police department nor Frey’s office had responded to requests for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia cuts gas in bid to divide West
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/us-allies-must-move-at-the-speed-of-war-to-help-ukraine/
GIST	<p>POKROVSK, Ukraine (AP) — Russia cut off natural gas to NATO members Poland and Bulgaria on Wednesday and threatened to do the same to other countries, using its most essential export in what was seen as a bid to punish and divide the West over its support for Ukraine.</p> <p>The move, condemned by European leaders as “blackmail,” marked a dramatic escalation in the economic war of sanctions and countersanctions that has unfolded in parallel to the fighting on the battlefield.</p> <p>The tactic, coming a day after the U.S. and other Western allies vowed to rush more and heavier weapons to Ukraine, could eventually force targeted nations to ration gas and could deal another blow to economies suffering from rising prices. At the same time, it could deprive Russia of badly needed income to fund its war effort.</p> <p>Poland has been a major gateway for the delivery of weapons to Ukraine and confirmed this week that it is sending the country tanks. Just hours before Russia’s state energy giant Gazprom acted, Poland announced a new set of sanctions against the company and other Russian businesses and oligarchs.</p> <p>Bulgaria, under a new liberal government that took office last fall, has cut many of its old ties to Moscow and likewise supported punitive measures against the Kremlin. It has also hosted Western fighter jets at a new NATO outpost on Bulgaria’s Black Sea coast.</p> <p>The gas cuts do not immediately put the two countries in any dire trouble. Poland, especially, has been working for many years to line up other suppliers, and the continent is heading into summer, making gas less essential for households.</p> <p>Also, Russian gas deliveries to both Poland and Bulgaria were expected to end later this year anyway.</p> <p>Still, the cutoff and the Kremlin warning that other countries could be next sent shivers of worry through the 27-nation European Union. Germany, the largest economy on the continent, and Italy are among Europe’s biggest consumers of Russian natural gas, though they, too, have been taking steps to reduce their dependence on Moscow.</p>

“It comes as no surprise that the Kremlin uses fossil fuels to try to blackmail us,” said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. “Today, the Kremlin failed once again in his attempt to sow division amongst member states. The era of Russian fossil fuel in Europe is coming to an end.”

Gazprom said it shut off the two countries because they refused to pay in rubles, as President Vladimir Putin has demanded of “unfriendly” nations. The Kremlin said other countries may be cut off if they don’t agree to the payment arrangement.

Most European countries have publicly balked at Russia’s demand for rubles, but it is not clear how many have actually faced the moment of decision so far. Greece’s next scheduled payment to Gazprom is due on May 25, for example, and the government must decide then whether to comply.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told his country’s parliament that he believes Poland’s support for Ukraine — and the new sanctions imposed by Warsaw on Tuesday — were the real reasons behind the gas cutoff.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov called the suspension blackmail, adding: “We will not succumb to such a racket.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia views gas as a weapon for political blackmail and “sees a united Europe as a target.”

On the battlefield, fighting continued in the country’s east along a largely static front line some 300 miles (480 kilometers) long.

Russia claimed its missiles hit a batch of weapons that the U.S. and European nations had delivered to Ukraine. One person was killed and at least two were injured when rockets hit a residential neighborhood in Kharkiv.

Western officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence findings, said Russia has made slow progress in the eastern Donbas region, with “minor gains,” including the capture of villages and small towns south of Izyum and on the outskirts of Rubizhne.

Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region, conceded that Russia has made minor progress in its advance on Rubizhne through its nearly constant bombardment, but that Ukrainian troops are fighting back and retreating only when there is nothing left to defend.

“There is no point in staying on territory that has been fired on so often that every meter is well known,” he said.

The Western officials said some Russian troops have been shifted from the gutted southern port city of Mariupol to other parts of the Donbas. But some remain in Mariupol to fight Ukrainian forces holed up at the Azovstal steel plant, the last stronghold in the city. About 1,000 civilians were said to be taking shelter there with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian defenders.

“The situation is very difficult. There are huge problems with water, food,” Serhii Volynskyi, commander of the marine unit inside the plant, said in a Facebook video message. He said hundreds of fighters and civilians were wounded and in need of medical help, and those inside included children, older people and disabled people.

In the Black Sea port city of Kherson, which Russian forces have occupied since early in the war, a series of explosions boomed late Wednesday near the television tower and at least temporarily knocked Russian channels off the air, Ukrainian and Russian news organizations reported.

Just across the border in Russia, an ammunition depot in the Belgorod region burned after several explosions were heard, the governor said. Blasts were also reported in Russia's Kursk region near the border, and authorities in Russia's Voronezh region said an air defense system shot down a drone.

Earlier this week, an oil storage facility in the Russian city of Bryansk was engulfed by fire.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak hinted at the country's involvement in the fires, saying in a Telegram post that "karma (is) a harsh thing."

A defiant Putin vowed Russia will achieve its military goals, telling parliament, "All the tasks of the special military operation we are conducting in the Donbas and Ukraine, launched on Feb. 24, will be unconditionally fulfilled."

Simone Tagliapietra, senior fellow at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels, said Russia's goal in cutting off the flow of gas is to "divide and rule" — pit European countries against one another as they cast about for energy.

While Poland gets around 45% of its gas from Russia, it relies overwhelmingly on coal and said it was well prepared for the cutoff. It has ample gas in storage and will soon benefit from two pipelines coming on line, analyst Emily McClain of Rystad Energy said.

Bulgaria gets over 90% of its gas from Russia, but it could increase imports from Azerbaijan, and a pipeline connection to Greece is set to be completed later this year.

Dobrin Todorov, a resident of Bulgaria's capital, Sofia, said the suspension is not a big problem.

"Ultimately, the choice between freedom and dignity or gas, the answer is clear, in favor of freedom and dignity," Todorov said, adding that a lack of gas "cannot be compared to the hardship and tribulations that the Ukrainian people are currently suffering."

Europe is not without its own leverage, since it is paying some \$400 million a day to Russia for gas, money Putin would lose in a complete cutoff. Russia can, in theory, sell oil elsewhere — to India and China, for instance. But it doesn't have the necessary pipelines in some cases, and it has only limited capacity to export gas by ship.

"The move that Russia did today is basically a move where Russia hurts itself," von der Leyen said.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Lockdowns test limits of China propaganda
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/world/asia/china-covid-propaganda.html
GIST	<p>Immediately after Beijing said it had detected a new coronavirus outbreak, officials hurried to assure residents there was no reason to panic. Food was plentiful, they said, and any lockdown measures would be smooth. But Evelyn Zheng, a freelance writer in the city, was not taking any chances.</p> <p>Her relatives, who lived in Shanghai, were urging her to leave or stock up on food. She had spent weeks poring over social media posts from that city, which documented the chaos and anguish of the monthlong lockdown there. And when she went out to buy more food, it was clear many of her neighbors had the same idea: Some shelves were already cleaned out.</p> <p>"At first, I was worried about Shanghai, because my family is there, and there was no good news from any of my friends," Zheng said. "Now, Beijing is starting, too, and I don't know when it will land on my head."</p> <p>Anger and anxiety over the Shanghai lockdown, now in its fourth week, has posed a rare challenge for China's powerful propaganda apparatus, which is central to the Communist Party's ability to stifle dissent.</p>

As the omicron variant continues to spread across the country, officials have defended their use of widespread, heavy-handed lockdowns. They have pushed a triumphalist narrative of their COVID response, which says that only the Chinese government had the will to confront, and hold back, the virus.

But among a populace with growing evidence of the costs of that approach, an alternate story — of rage, frustration and despair — is finding an audience. The anger, if not contained, could pose the biggest political test for China's leadership since the outbreak began. China's leader, Xi Jinping, has staked his legitimacy on successful control of the pandemic, a message that has only been amplified before this fall, when he is expected to claim an unprecedented third term.

Since Shanghai's lockdown began, residents there have railed against the harsh measures, which have led to food shortages, delayed medical care, shoddy quarantine conditions and even physical fencing around residents' homes. Officials have responded with their usual playbook, censoring critical posts, inundating state media with positive stories and blaming foreign forces for fanning false ones. But far from stemming the anger, they have fueled it.

Residents have compiled footage from their daily lives, showing rotting food or shouting matches with local officials, rebutting the authorities' story of a tidy, cheery outbreak response. They have banded together to repost deleted content with a speed and savvy that for a time overwhelmed censors' ability to keep up. Even some members of the political and academic elite have suggested that the government's propaganda about Shanghai is hurting its credibility.

The failure of the typical tools of narrative control speaks in part to Shanghai's status as a financial capital, home to many internet-savvy elites. But it also underscores the urgent nature of the complaints. These are not the abstract political critiques or one-off news stories that the propaganda machine has grown adept at stifling or spinning. They are born of life-or-death scenarios, with an immediacy not easily excised by censors.

"The reality is that these past few years, official propaganda has been pretty successful, or at least rarely has met such strong pushback," Fang Kecheng, a journalism professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who studies media and politics. "We can see this is not a regular situation. The temperature of public opinion is very different."

The rage and sorrow in Shanghai hit a new peak last weekend, when vast numbers of people shared a video chronicling residents' experiences of the authorities' failures. The six-minute video, called "Voices of April," overlaid black-and-white images of the city's skyline with voice recordings from the past month: of residents chanting for the government to provide supplies; of a son begging for his sick father to be admitted to a hospital; of a tearful official explaining to a frustrated caller that she, too, was exhausted and helpless.

The video, first posted by an anonymous social media user, was quickly taken down. But users embarked on a cat-and-mouse game to keep it beyond censors' notice, posting it upside down, embedding it within separate images or adding its audio atop unrelated clips. In one workaround post, the video played on a cartoon computer watched by SpongeBob SquarePants in the back of the Krusty Krab.

The scale of the censorship required to silence dissent is "too large this time" according to Xiao Qiang, a researcher on internet freedom at the University of California, Berkeley. He likened the deletions of the video and other complaints from Shanghai to the massive efforts to erase mourning for Li Wenliang, a Wuhan doctor who was reprimanded by police for issuing an early warning about the outbreak, then died of the coronavirus himself.

"The censorship is more effective than two years ago, but this shows its limit. They can't solve the root of the problem. People see the government could be getting this wrong to the point of disaster," Xiao said, pointing to emerging complaints that the zero-COVID policy could be self-defeating and unrealistic.

When state media praised the construction of large makeshift hospitals to house patients or their close contacts, residents quickly offered their own take. In a podcast last week, two young Shanghai residents who had recently been sent to those facilities described seeing older or disabled patients struggling to use squat toilets, or pleading to be sent to a real hospital.

An accompanying write-up of the podcast episode was censored within two days, but not before it had been viewed more than 10 million times, according to a blog post by the host.

Another reliable tactic for authorities has typically been blaming negative news on foreign forces intent on undermining China. But that, too, has fallen flat. When a hashtag attacking the United States' human rights record began trending on Chinese social media, some repurposed it as a way to complain about China, listing off recent problems and sarcastically attributing them to the U.S. The film title "La La Land" was censored after some online used it to allude to a moment when a foreign ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, told foreign journalists they should be happy to live in China because they benefited from China's COVID controls.

At times, public skepticism of the official line has been so intense that it has forced authorities to respond.

Earlier this month, a Shanghai television channel announced plans to air a star-studded variety show, complete with song and dance, celebrating the government's response to the outbreak. But after furious online backlash, the channel postponed the broadcast.

"We welcome everyone's precious feedback," it wrote on Weibo.

Several days later, CCTV, the state broadcaster, showed a video of shoppers walking past heaps of vegetables at a Shanghai grocery store. Many online accused them of staging the footage, citing their own inability to leave their homes or obtain food. Eventually, the Shanghai government issued a statement pledging that the footage had been genuine.

Officials are now trying the same tactics again in Beijing, despite their limited success in Shanghai. Over the weekend, some articles showing photos of bare grocery store shelves and long checkout lines were censored.

But those tasked with pushing the official message have not escaped the unease that Shanghai inspired, either.

On Sunday, Liu Xin, a reporter in Beijing for a state-owned television channel, wrote on social media that she had stocked up on groceries, writing, "Beijing's turn" and "let the tough times come" alongside images of empty shelves. (By the next day, she had deleted the post and uploaded photos of an apparently fully stocked store.)

Other official outlets have opted not to directly acknowledge the lockdown fears at all.

As some Beijing residents rushed to buy extra freezers to be able to store more food, the state-run Beijing Evening News wrote a short article on the surge in appliance purchases. It reported that one vendor had sold more than 300 freezers — the equivalent of one month's usual sales — on Sunday.

But the article made no mention of the epidemic: "The main reason for the hot sales of freezers is that their volume is relatively small and their price is cheap, so it is a good supplement to household refrigerators."

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HEADLINE	04/27 Next Covid wave? US won't spot it
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/when-the-next-covid-wave-breaks-the-us-wont-be-able-to-spot-it/
GIST	LINES ON CHARTS can tell you something about the state of the Covid pandemic in the United States. Deaths: declining, even with the looming milestone of the millionth US death. Hospitalizations: at

historically low levels, but ticking back up. Cases: rising, particularly in the Northeast, reliably a harbinger for the rest of the country.

What you can't do with those lines is use them to map your way forward—because at this point, we've reached the choose-your-own-adventure stage of the pandemic. Most mask mandates have been lifted. Testing programs have been cut back, here and [in other countries](#). Congress has declined to fund big chunks of the White House's Covid agenda. Knowing where you are at risk is more confusing than ever, and likely to get more challenging as predicted new variants arrive.

All the indicators suggest the US is likely poised for a new surge of Covid; in some parts of the country, that surge may already be arriving. But in our zeal to declare the pandemic over, we may have maneuvered ourselves into a position where it is now harder to detect a coming wave. "More and more, the relaxation of public health requirements, mandates, has placed responsibility on the individual and the employer," says Saskia Popescu, an infectious-disease epidemiologist and an assistant professor at George Mason University. "But I've noticed that when we relax these mandates, we're doing that at times that are really inopportune, when case numbers are already increasing."

And cases *are* increasing in the US. The [seven-day moving average](#) calculated by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stood at 42,605 cases last week, which was [35 percent higher](#) than one week earlier. The number of counties that score high and medium on the CDC's "community levels" map [both increased](#) last week.

All of this is due to the [Omicron variant](#) that [roared across the world](#) last November, and even more to its fast-emerging sublineages. What most of us think of as Omicron is known scientifically as BA.1; that was supplanted [in January](#) by [a newer version, BA.2](#). Omicron's initial success and laser-fast spread were driven by its ability to work around the immune protections created by vaccination. Even though it triggered less-severe disease, it caused so many cases that it crushed hospitals. BA.2 did not leverage immune escape in the same manner BA.1 did, but it turned out to be more ferociously transmissible than its already-contagious predecessor. By mid-March, the World Health Organization [reported](#) that BA.2 had become the dominant strain worldwide.

Simultaneously, BA.3 emerged, then BA.4 and BA.5, rapidly [displacing other variants](#) in southern Africa and migrating to countries [in Europe](#). Meanwhile, a variation on BA.2 with the technical designation BA.2.12.1 is surging as well. In a weekly assessment [published Tuesday](#) by the CDC, it now accounts for almost 29 percent of US cases.

These subvariants matter for two reasons: First, each is a sign that SARS-CoV-2 won't be lifting its siege anytime soon. On Monday, evolutionary biologist Tom Wenseleers [predicted](#) "a significant wave every six months with significant mortality and morbidity."

And secondly, this relentlessness has a [biological objective](#). Think of the endlessly evolving coronavirus like a burglar trying to get into your house: twisting every doorknob, testing every window, looking for any gap that might let it enter. On a societal level, the protections we maintain against Covid have a lot of gaps now: Only two-thirds of the US population [have received](#) two doses of a Covid vaccine, and fewer than half have been boosted—though it's this immunity tune-up that [confers protection](#) against Omicron and its relations.

There is no guarantee future variants will be milder than the first version of Omicron was. Virologists argue the opposite: In March, European researchers wrote [in Nature](#) that "the lower severity of Omicron is nothing but a lucky coincidence."

All of this puts us in line for a surge, one that we don't see coming. Since the beginning of the year, states have shuttered their PCR testing sites, the Department of Health and Human Services has changed the metrics for data it reports, and huge numbers of Americans have switched to at-home antigen tests, which do not require reporting results. A [recent CDC report](#) tried to quantify home test use, using data from public survey platforms, and found their use had tripled since the beginning of the Omicron wave. Rapid

home tests are great for individuals, making people aware of when they are contagious and giving them a head start on launching antiviral treatment. But they fail on a societal level because most of the time, the test result isn't handed off to be aggregated with anyone else's data.

"With so many at-home tests being done, the pullback on publicly available PCR testing, and reduced access to testing in general, it's not surprising that we would have data gaps," Popescu says. "That more and more people have access to antigen testing is great. But there's not a good mechanism for using that data for surveillance."

To do the most useful surveillance, you need more than a yes-no test result. You need a biological sample, the kind that the [swabs for PCR tests](#) retrieve. As PCR tests diminish, those samples become less available. Plus, the ability to extract genomic information from them, in order to characterize variants and track their evolution, differs with location and local investment. "There's a large amount of variability of sequencing by state," says Lee Harrison, a physician and professor of infectious diseases at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. "Some states are sequencing north of 20 percent of their specimens. Some are way, way down."

Some experts say it's time to create new structures that will let us detect the virus' movement and evolution before it slips from our grasp. One idea is to create a new surveillance program for Covid based on what the CDC has already built for flu. The flu's arrival is somewhat predictable—but most people who experience symptoms during flu season simply assume they have it, and don't seek testing to prove it.

Since few test results are available, the CDC compensates with [other overlapping data-collection schemes](#). Some involve re-analyzing the respiratory specimens that hospitals use to diagnose flu in admitted patients, looking for the virus type and its susceptibility to antivirals. Others collect reports of illnesses in nursing homes or symptoms recorded in outpatients to build nationwide portraits of flu-like illness.

"Something like what we do for flu is where we probably need to go," says Kelly Wroblewski, director of infectious disease programs at the Association of Public Health Laboratories. "SARS-CoV-2 is not going to go away. It is going to be a virus that we have to monitor and pay attention to for the foreseeable future."

Another idea, which Harrison's team at Pitt has been trialing since [before Covid struck](#), is to apply genome sequencing as broadly as possible, in as close to real time as possible, to samples taken from hospitalized patients. Sequencing routinely and running the results through machine learning, as Pitt's hospital now does for some pathogens that cause hospital infections, [allowed the team to detect](#) unrecognized outbreaks within the hospital population, lifting the signal of transmission out of the background noise of random infections. Applying that method to other infections as well, Harrison said, could allow additional insight into patterns of spread. "I'm convinced that whole genome sequencing surveillance is going to have to become a routine part of US health care," he says. "When you sequence, it brings the epidemiology to life."

An overarching challenge of creating new surveillance methods is receiving results fast enough to act on them. Throughout the pandemic, scientists have been adding whatever genomic sequences they identify [to an international database](#) known as GISAID (the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data, which was its first purpose). That database is comprehensive, but not quick; depending on the jurisdiction the sample is coming from, it can take a month to get data added.

[Wastewater surveillance](#), another novel tool, detects the presence of the virus regardless of whether people take tests, and it can flag a variant's arrival more than a week before traditional tests do. It represents what a laboratory specialist would call a pooled sample; whatever virus lurks within it cannot be traced back to a patient. But the distribution of these systems, too, is patchy. The CDC collects data from almost 500 points of analysis, but most of them are clustered in only a few states, and 18 states have no sewage surveillance at all.

	None of these tools are perfect. Some exist only at the small, pilot scale; others remain conceptual. And yet our existing tools for tracking Covid's movement are being downgraded or put aside, thanks to changed government priorities and disinvestment. So for now we face a data gap—and the next surge may take us by surprise.
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HEADLINE	04/27 SPD illegally ignored Covid mask rules
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article260808737.html
GIST	<p>A civilian oversight board says some Seattle police officers routinely — and illegally — ignored state and city mask mandates during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and refused to obey direct orders from the chief to comply.</p> <p>The Seattle Times reports that a recently released review by the Office of Inspector General exposed a “serious cultural issue” within the department.</p> <p>The report states the department was fined \$17,500 last year after receiving two notices of “serious violations” of the Washington Administrative Code over officers’ refusal to comply with the mandates after inspections by the state Department of Labor and Industries. The report noted it was difficult for command staff to demand officers comply with the regulations because some captains and assistant chiefs didn’t mask up, either.</p> <p>L&I concluded the police department “did not provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that are causing, or likely to cause, serious injury or death.”</p> <p>The department’s OIG, one of three civilian-run police oversight agencies, said the police chief gave officers “clear direction” and “explicit orders” about mask-wearing as early as March 2020 — followed by a string of increasingly stern reminders.</p> <p>Interim Chief Adrian Diaz then issued a direct order in January 2021 that all officers comply with the city’s mask policy, saying any violation would be referred to internal affairs.</p> <p>“The emails demonstrate that command staff and supervisors struggled to gain widespread compliance with orders pertaining to masking,” the OIG report issued on April 15 said.</p> <p>That same month, a captain emailed that he was “just stunned at the noncompliance.” No officer was ever disciplined for refusing to wearing a mask, according to the report and a statement from the Office of Police Accountability. Inspector General Lisa Judge concluded this decision set a questionable precedent.</p> <p>A statement issued Tuesday by SPD did not address the report’s specifics.</p> <p>“The Department acknowledges the findings of this report and the concerns it states,” the statement said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Covid primary cause work-related deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article260814722.html
GIST	<p>COVID-19 continued to be the primary cause of work-related deaths for the second year in a row, according to the Washington state Department of Labor and Industries.</p> <p>L&I issued a statement Wednesday that 106 workers in total died as a result of their job in 2021. Of those, 26 deaths were related to COVID-19, after those individuals contracted the virus from their workplaces. That total was an increase from COVID-19 work-related deaths in 2020. However, fewer workers died overall in 2021 than in 2020.</p>

	<p>“Even as we believe that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, we find ourselves looking back on another year where COVID was the leading cause of job-related deaths,” L&I director Joel Sacks said in the statement. “We will not forget those who lost their lives to COVID or other causes. We all need to do everything in our power to ensure every worker goes home safe at the end of the day.”</p> <p>In an email to McClatchy, a spokesperson for L&I said that six of the workers who died from COVID-19 worked in the healthcare industry, including one at a dentist’s office. Four worked in social services including a psychiatrist, a wheelchair van driver and two caregivers. Three corrections officers and two police officers also died as a result of COVID-19 contracted on the job.</p> <p>Food workers, laborers, manufacturers, an orchard worker, a retail worker, and a transit driver were also included in the breakdown.</p> <p>Other “occupational illnesses” claimed the lives of another 15 workers, the agency said.</p> <p>The agency said that 22 workers were killed in the construction industry in 2021, making it the most dangerous industry last year.</p> <p>Agriculture deaths saw a decline from 21 killed in 2020 to 11 in 2021.</p> <p>The number of workers killed in vehicle crashes totaled 21 in 2021, tripling the previous year’s number of crash-related deaths.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Officials warn about home-canned foods
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article260810342.html
GIST	<p>Officials are urging the public to use safe practices when consuming home-canned foods after they say a man in Washington likely died from botulism.</p> <p>A man aged 55 to 65 died from what officials believe was the illness after health officials helped him dispose of home-canned food jars, Grays Harbor County Public Health said in a news release on Monday, April 25.</p> <p>Though the man’s cause of death hasn’t been confirmed yet, the release states.</p> <p>Botulism is “a rare but serious illness” that is caused by a toxin made by certain bacteria, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The bacteria can “produce the toxin in food, wounds, and the intestines of infants.”</p> <p>“Botulism is odorless and cannot be seen or tasted; however, even a small taste of food containing the toxin can be deadly,” the county news release states.</p> <p>The bacteria that produce the botulinum toxin are found naturally in “many places,” though they rarely makes people sick, the CDC says. But once the bacteria make spores under certain conditions, they can become lethal.</p> <p>Low oxygen, salt or sugar, certain temperatures and certain amounts of water can create the conditions for spores to produce the toxins, the CDC says. Improperly home-canned and fermented foods can provide these conditions.</p> <p>A person can become seriously sick or die if they consume foods with the toxin, the health agency says.</p> <p>”The CDC stresses that home canning, while a fun and productive way to preserve everything from seafood to vegetables, can put people at risk of botulism if not done correctly,” the agency said. “Using</p>

	proper canning techniques, the right kind of equipment, and disposing of any canned foods that may not have been properly preserved is the best way to keep your home canned goods safe.”
	Foodborne botulism symptoms include vomiting, nausea, stomach pain and diarrhea, the CDC says. The illness begins about 18 to 36 hours after eating the contaminated food.
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HEADLINE	04/27 Judge nixes lawsuit against WA Cares
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/federal-judge-dismisses-lawsuit-against-wa-cares-ruling-action-should-be-brought-in-state-court/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA — WA Cares has for now survived another challenge, this time after a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit against Washington’s first-of-its-kind long-term care program.</p> <p>A Democratic priority styled as social insurance passed into law in 2019, WA Cares will allow eligible state residents to collect up to \$36,500 to pay for things like meals, transportation and respite care and other needs.</p> <p>To pay for that, the program will impose a 0.58% payroll tax on employees in Washington — about \$290 per year for somebody making \$50,000 annually — starting in July 2023.</p> <p>Last November, six individuals and a trio of businesses filed a legal challenge to WA Cares in the Western District of Washington against Gov. Jay Inslee and state officials.</p> <p>Among other things, that lawsuit alleged that WA Cares runs afoul of multiple federal laws, like one that forbids a state from having a law requiring workers to participate in a plan providing medical or sickness benefits.</p> <p>The legal challenge also contended disparate treatment of people paying the tax but not getting any benefits if they aren’t a resident of Washington state, and that it also violated the U.S. Constitution’s Equal Protection and the Privileges and Immunities clauses.</p> <p>But in a ruling Tuesday, U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Zilly struck down those arguments, saying his federal court did not have jurisdiction.</p> <p>“Any legal challenge to WA Cares must be brought in state court,” he wrote.</p> <p>That is unlikely to happen immediately, according to Richard Birmingham, an attorney with Davis Wright Tremaine who represents the plaintiffs.</p> <p>“Any state law challenge we may pursue will likely wait until July 1, 2023, the next date by which premium is scheduled to be collected,” Birmingham wrote in an email.</p> <p>That delay will also allow state appeals judges or the state Supreme Court to first resolve a pending legal challenge against another big Democratic priority, he wrote: a lawsuit against the new capital-gains tax.</p> <p>A Douglas County Superior Court judge last month ruled that tax unconstitutional in a case that will likely reach the Supreme Court. The ultimate outcome could be relevant in a new legal challenge against WA Cares, according to Birmingham.</p> <p>In a statement, WA Cares Fund Director Ben Veghte praised Zilly’s ruling.</p> <p>“We are glad to see this decision from the court,” Veghte, whose office is part of the state Department of Social and Health Services, said in prepared remarks, adding: “This decision is another step toward making long-term care accessible for all Washingtonians and setting an example for the rest of the nation to follow.”</p>

	<p>Democratic lawmakers and advocacy groups have pointed to the help many people will need as they age as a reason the program is needed. Opponents and even some supporters, however, have criticized the number of state residents who will pay into WA Cares but never receive a benefit.</p> <p>Under that pressure, Democrats scrambled to delay the state collection of the payroll tax — which had been scheduled to start Jan. 1 this year — and make changes to the law at the start of this year’s legislative session. Inslee quickly signed those bills into law.</p> <p>Under those changes, some people who will pay into the program but would never be eligible for benefits will now be able to permanently opt out of WA Cares.</p> <p>Those people include about 150,000 people who work in Washington but whose residence is in another state, like Oregon or Idaho; military families rotating through the state; and some disabled veterans.</p> <p>Under the original law passed in 2019 creating the program, about 477,000 state residents near retirement age might not have become fully vested to claim full benefits.</p> <p>And so the legislation signed by Inslee also changed the formulas so residents born before 1968 who aren’t fully vested can still receive partial benefits according to the number of years they ultimately pay into WA Cares.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia tanks suffer ‘jack-in-the-box’ effect
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/27/europe/russia-tanks-blown-turrets-intl-hnk-ml/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Russian tanks with their tops blown off are just the latest sign that Russia's invasion of Ukraine isn't going to plan.</p> <p>Hundreds of Russian tanks are thought to have been destroyed since Moscow launched its offensive, with British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace on Monday estimating it had lost as many as 580.</p> <p>But Moscow's problems go beyond the sheer number of tanks it has lost. Experts say battlefield images show Russian tanks are suffering from a defect that Western militaries have known about for decades and refer to as the "jack-in-the-box effect." Moscow, they say, should have seen the problem coming.</p> <p>The problem relates to how the tanks' ammunition is stored. Unlike modern Western tanks, Russian ones carry multiple shells within their turrets. This makes them highly vulnerable as even an indirect hit can start a chain reaction that explodes their entire ammunition store of up to 40 shells.</p> <p>The resulting shockwave can be enough to blast the tank's turret as high as a two-story building, as can be seen in a recent video on social media.</p> <p>"What we are witnessing with Russian tanks is a design flaw," said Sam Bendett, an adviser with the Russian Studies Program at the Center for a New American Security.</p> <p>"Any successful hit ... quickly ignites the ammo causing a massive explosion, and the turret is literally blown off."</p> <p>The flaw means the tank's crew -- usually two men in the turret and a third driving -- are sitting ducks, said Nicholas Drummond, a defense industry analyst specializing in land warfare and a former British Army officer.</p> <p>"If you don't get out within the first second, you're toast."</p> <p>The 'jack-in-the-box' effect</p>

Drummond said exploding munitions are causing problems for almost all of the armored vehicles Russia is using in Ukraine. He gave the example of the BMD-4 infantry fighting vehicle, typically manned by up to three crew and able to carry another five soldiers. He said the BMD-4 was a "mobile coffin" that was "just obliterated" when hit by a rocket.

But the design flaw with its tanks should be particularly galling for Moscow as the problems have been so widely telegraphed.

They came to the attention of Western militaries during the Gulf wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, when large numbers of the Iraqi army's Russian-made T-72 tanks suffered the same fate -- turrets being blown from their bodies in anti-tank missile strikes.

Drummond said Russia hadn't learned the lessons from Iraq and that consequently many of its tanks in Ukraine featured similar design flaws with their autoloading missile systems.

When the T-90 series -- the successor to the T-72 -- came into service in 1992 its armor was upgraded but its missile loading system remained similar to its predecessor's, leaving it just as vulnerable, Drummond said. The T-80, another Russian tank seeing action in the Ukraine invasion, has a similar missile loading system.

There are some benefits to such a system. Bendett, at the Center for a New American Security, said Russia had chosen this system to save space and give the tanks a lower profile, making them harder to hit in battle.

Western militaries, however, had been spurred into action by the T-72's fate in Iraq.

"(Western militaries) all learned from the Gulf War, and from seeing tanks killed during that time, that you have to compartmentalize the ammunition," Drummond said.

He pointed to the US military's Stryker infantry fighting vehicles developed after the first war in Iraq.

"That has a turret that sits on top, and that turret does not enter the crew compartment. It purely sits on top and all the ammunition is inside that turret," he said. "So if the turret gets hit and blown off, the crew is still safe below. That's a very clever design."

Other Western tanks, such as the M1 Abrams used by the US and some allied armies, are larger and have no carousel. In the Abrams, a fourth crew member in the tank retrieves shells from a sealed compartment and transfers them to the gun for firing.

The compartment has a door that the crew member opens and closes between each shot taken by the tank, meaning that if the tank is hit, only one shell is likely to be exposed in the turret.

"An accurate hit can damage the tank, but not necessarily kill the crew," Bendett said.

And Drummond said the shells used by Western militaries sometimes burn under the high heat generated by an incoming missile, but they don't explode.

Hard to replace

There is no easy way of knowing how many Russian tanks have been destroyed in Ukraine. The open-source intelligence monitoring website Oryx said on April 28 that at least 300 Russian tanks had been destroyed, with another 279 either damaged, abandoned or captured.

However, the site only counts instances where it has visual evidence, so Russian losses could be much higher.

	<p>And these losses are not just about equipment. When Wallace, the British defense secretary, gave his estimate of 580 lost tanks to the House of Commons he also said more than 15,000 Russian military personnel had been killed during its invasion.</p> <p>It's hard to know how many of those are tank crew, but what is not in doubt is that the crews are not easy to replace.</p> <p>Training a tank crew could take up to 12 months, said Aleski Roinila, a former tank crewman in the Finnish Defense Forces, "and that's considered quick."</p> <p>And for Russia to replace hundreds of crew at this point in the war would be a tall order -- especially when the tanks they are expected to use are so flawed.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 WHO, UNICEF: measles outbreaks possible
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/measles-outbreaks-amid-perfect-storm-conditions-unicef-warn/story?id=84349818
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization and UNICEF are warning of a "perfect storm" of circumstances fueling the potential for large-scale measles outbreaks, underscoring worrying signs of increased risk as infections around the globe this year are far above what they were this time last year.</p> <p>In the first two months of 2022, reported measles cases worldwide increased by nearly 80%, compared to the same timeframe in 2021, the organizations said in a joint news release, adding that conditions are "ripe" for serious outbreaks of the vaccine-preventable illness.</p> <p>"Pandemic-related disruptions, increasing inequalities in access to vaccines and the diversion of resources from routine immunization are leaving too many children without protection against measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases," the organizations said, adding that the risk for large outbreaks "has increased as communities relax social distancing practices and other preventive measures for COVID-19 implemented during the height of the pandemic."</p> <p>Almost 17,338 cases of the highly contagious disease were reported worldwide in January and February 2022, compared to 9,665 during the first two months of 2021.</p> <p>Brewing humanitarian crises have inflamed the issue.</p> <p>"With millions of people being displaced due to conflicts and crises, including in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Somalia and Afghanistan, disruptions in routine immunization and COVID-19 vaccination services, lack of clean water and sanitation, and overcrowding increase the risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks," the organizations said.</p> <p>"The agencies are concerned that outbreaks of measles could also forewarn outbreaks of other diseases that do not spread as rapidly," WHO and UNICEF said, noting that besides its direct effect on the body, which can be lethal, the measles virus also weakens the immune system and makes a child more vulnerable to other infectious diseases such as pneumonia and diarrhea for months after the measles infection -- among those who survive.</p> <p>This is not the first time global health agencies have warned of lagging pediatric immunizations being an issue of urgent address.</p> <p>In an April meeting, the WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts noted that disruptions to routine immunization programs puts "millions of children at risk of disease outbreaks," and "large and disruptive outbreaks of measles have occurred in at least 19 countries during the past 12 months."</p>

And in the U.S., as ABC has reported, vaccination coverage for kindergarteners fell below the nationwide target during the 2020-2021 school year, according to CDC data, [raising concerns about vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles](#), mumps and whooping cough.

Experts worry pandemic disruptions could inadvertently lead to a growing number of vaccine-preventable illnesses among children.

In 2020, 23 million children missed out on basic childhood vaccines through routine health services, the highest number since 2009 and 3.7 million more than in 2019, the WHO and UNICEF said Wednesday.

As of April 1, 57 vaccine-preventable disease campaigns in 43 countries that were scheduled to take place since the start of the pandemic are still postponed, impacting 203 million people, most of whom are children, the agencies said. Nineteen of those postponed are measles campaigns, putting 73 million children at risk of measles due to missed vaccinations.

In Ukraine, the measles catch-up campaign of 2019 "was interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and thereafter due to the war," the WHO and UNICEF said. "Routine and catch-up campaigns are needed wherever access is possible to help make sure there are not repeated outbreaks as in 2017-2019, when there were over 115,000 cases of measles and 41 deaths in the country -- this was the highest incidence in Europe."

As of this April, the agencies said there have been 21 large and disruptive measles outbreaks around the world in the last 12 months. Most of the measles cases were reported in Africa and the East Mediterranean region.

Countries with the largest measles outbreaks since the past year include Somalia, Yemen, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Ethiopia.

The figures are likely higher, as the pandemic has disrupted surveillance systems globally, with potential underreporting, the agencies said.

The agencies cited insufficient measles vaccine coverage as the primary reason for the outbreaks "wherever they occur."

"Measles is more than a dangerous and potentially deadly disease. It is also an early indication that there are gaps in our global immunization coverage, gaps vulnerable children cannot afford," UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said in a statement. "It is encouraging that people in many communities are beginning to feel protected enough from COVID-19 to return to more social activities. But doing so in places where children are not receiving routine vaccination creates the perfect storm for the spread of a disease like measles."

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HEADLINE	04/27 Latin America nations ease restrictions
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/latin-american-nations-ease-restrictions-covid-cases-drop-84353777
GIST	<p>BOGOTA, Colombia -- Colombians will soon be going to movie theaters without having to wear face masks. Chile opens its borders next week for the first time in two years. Mexico's president has declared the pandemic over. And in Rio de Janeiro, tens of thousands attended Carnival parades just two months after the world-famous spectacle was postponed to prevent COVID-19 infections.</p> <p>Even as coronavirus cases rise half a world away in China and authorities there impose new lockdowns, plummeting infection rates in Latin America have countries eliminating restrictions on mass gatherings, lifting some travel requirements and scrapping mask mandates that have been in place for two years.</p>

The region has been hit hard by the pandemic, with nations like Brazil and Peru registering some of the world's highest death tolls. But cases and deaths fell this month in most places to lows resembling levels last seen in the first two months of the pandemic.

Some epidemiologists believe vaccination campaigns and months of exposure to different strains of the virus have helped the region's populations resist new waves of contagion.

"What we appear to be seeing is that while the virus is still circulating, many people are not falling ill or presenting symptoms," said Fernando de la Hoz, an epidemiology professor at the National University in Bogota, Colombia's capital.

Last year Latin American countries were pummeled by the coronavirus, with the Delta and Gamma variants — the latter of which emerged in Brazil — infecting millions and killing hundreds of thousands.

In June, Brazil reached 500,000 deaths and seven countries in South America were among the 10 nations in the world with the highest death rates per capita.

Peru is now the only Latin American nation still to have that dubious distinction, according to data compiled by Statista, a market research platform. But even in Peru, COVID-19 deaths have fallen dramatically, from more than 200 a day in February to around 20 by the end of April. Coronavirus intensive care units, packed a year ago, were at just 11% of capacity at the beginning of this month according to the Ministry of Health.

The BA.2 variant of the virus, which spread rapidly through China, the United States and some European countries in March, has not had a significant impact in most of the region so far.

In Colombia, cases are down from 35,000 per day in mid-January, when the omicron variant peaked, to around 250 per day. Daily deaths are in the single digits, and as of the first week of April, just 177 of a total of 10,700 ICU beds were occupied by coronavirus patients, according to the Pan American Health Organization.

"We don't expect that wave from China to arrive here because our strategy has been different to theirs," Martha Lucía Ospina, the director of Colombia's National Health Institute, told radio station La FM this month.

"They shut down contact with the outside world as they aimed for a zero Covid strategy ... while we opened up gradually and applied different kinds of vaccines that have generated an interesting mix of immunity," Ospina said.

Most countries in the region have met the World Health Organization's target of vaccinating 70% of their people with at least two doses.

As case numbers and hospitalizations fall away, so do many restrictions on social life.

Brazil's federal government revoked a 2020 measure that declared the pandemic a health emergency, and many states have eased mask mandates and other constraints.

Masks were not required last weekend at the packed Sambadrome, Rio's Carnival parade ground, which can hold more than 60,000 spectators. Vaccination cards were supposedly a condition for entry, but people had no trouble getting in without them. After being suspended in February, the celebrations were moved to an April holiday.

Colombia's government announced that starting May 1, masks will no longer be needed at shopping malls, cinemas and other large indoor venues in cities with vaccination rates of at least 70%.

	<p>Argentina lifted all travel restrictions in March including for unvaccinated people, and Buenos Aires, the capital, no longer requires masks in any venues.</p> <p>In Central America, El Salvador stopped requiring them in public spaces as of April 21st.</p> <p>Masks are also no longer mandatory in most places in Mexico, which has seen daily cases fall from 40,000 in late January to 1,000 in mid-April. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said this week that the country had entered a “new stage” in which the virus will have seasonal variations.</p> <p>There is at least one place where infections are rising: In Puerto Rico, cases rebounded after mask requirements and caps on attendance in public venues were lifted March 10, prompting the island's government this month to once again mandate masks at large events.</p> <p>The island surpassed 3,000 cases a day this week, according to Johns Hopkins University, up from about 200 per day during the first week of March.</p> <p>Iván Darío Vélez, a specialist in infectious diseases at Colombia's University of Antioquia, said new mutations and outbreaks can still happen in the coming months, and governments in the region may have to apply new rounds of vaccinations or take other steps.</p> <p>“This virus is very unpredictable,” he added. “Governments will have to monitor its behavior closely and take appropriate measures.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Occupied city fears sham Russia plans
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/occupied-ukrainian-city-fears-sham-russian-referendum-plans-84363726
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine -- Ever since Russian forces took the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson in early March, residents sensed the occupiers had a special plan for their town. Now, amid a crescendo of warnings from Ukraine that Russia plans to stage a sham referendum to transform the territory into a pro-Moscow “people's republic,” it appears locals guessed right.</p> <p>After Russian forces withdrew from occupied areas around Kyiv in early April, they left behind scenes of horror and traumatized communities. But in Kherson — a large city with a major ship-building industry, located at the confluence of the Dnieper River and the Black Sea near Russian-annexed Crimea — the occupying forces have taken a different tack.</p> <p>“The soldiers patrol and walk around silently. They don’t shoot people in the streets,” said Olga, a local teacher, in a telephone interview last month after the region was sealed off by Russian forces. “They are trying to give the impression that they come in peace to liberate us from something.”</p> <p>“It is a little scary,” said 63-year-old Alexander, who like other residents gave only his first name for fear of reprisals. “But there is no panic, people are helping each other. There is a very small minority of people who are happy that it is under Russian control, but mostly, nobody wants Kherson to become a part of Russia.”</p> <p>While the city has so far been spared the atrocities committed elsewhere, daily life is far from normal. After Russia occupied Kherson and the surrounding region, all access was cut off. Kherson now suffers from a severe shortage of medicine, cash, dairy and other food products, and Ukrainian officials warn the region could face a “humanitarian catastrophe.”</p> <p>Russia has blocked all humanitarian assistance except its own, which troops deliver before Russian state TV cameras, and which many residents refuse to accept. With no cash deliveries to Kherson’s banks, the circulation of Ukraine's hryvnia currency is dwindling, and damaged communication networks mean credit</p>

card payments often fail to go through. Access to Ukrainian TV has been blocked and replaced by Russian state channels. A strict curfew has been imposed.

Residents believe Russian troops have not yet besieged or terrorized the city — as they did in Bucha and Mariupol — because they are planning to hold a referendum to create a so-called “People's Republic of Kherson” like the pro-Russia breakaway territories in eastern Ukraine. Ballots are already being printed for a vote to be held by early May, Ukrainian human rights ombudsman Lyudmila Denisova warned this month.

In an address to the nation on Friday, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke directly to residents of occupied Kherson, accusing Russia of planning an orchestrated referendum and urging residents to be careful about personal data they share with Russian soldiers, warning there could be attempts to falsify votes. “This is a reality. Be careful,” he said.

Kherson Mayor Igor Kolykhaiev joined the chorus of warnings, saying in a Zoom interview on Ukrainian TV that such a vote would be illegal since Kherson remains officially part of Ukraine.

Russia has been silent about any plans to hold a referendum in Kherson, with Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko saying this week he knew of no such proposal.

But there is reason for concern. In 2014, a disputed referendum in Crimea amid the Russian annexation was widely believed to be falsified, with results showing nearly 97% of voters supported joining Russia.

A series of Russian actions this week have added to the growing sense of panic in Kherson. The mayor reported on social media on Monday that Russian troops had seized City Hall, where the Ukrainian flag no longer flew. On Tuesday, the Russians replaced the mayor with their own appointee.

A prominent Russian commander, Maj. Gen. Rustam Minnekayev, announced plans to take “total control” of southern Ukraine and the Donbas, eastern Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking industrial heartland, with the aim of setting up a land corridor to Crimea. And Ukrainian military intelligence reported that Russia intends to forcibly mobilize the local population, including doctors, in the southern occupied territories to support the Russian war effort.

Kherson is a strategically important city and the gateway to broader control of the south. From Kherson, Russia could launch a more powerful offensive against other southern cities, including Odesa and Kriviy Rih.

The occupation of the Kherson region would also maintain Russia's access to the North Crimean canal. After the annexation, Ukraine cut off water from the canal, which flows from the Dnieper River to Crimea and previously supplied 85% of the peninsula's needs.

Volodymyr Fesenko, a political analyst at the Penta Center think tank in Kyiv, says the Russian military's softer behavior in Kherson is because units from Crimea and separatists from Donetsk and Luhansk, who are either ethnic Ukrainians or have close connections to the region, are deployed there. “Therefore, there have been no atrocities,” he said.

The situation in the surrounding Kherson region, however, tells a very different story — with daily reports of kidnappings, torture, killings or rape. Thousands of people have been deprived of electricity, water and gas.

“The situation in the Kherson region is much worse and much more tragic,” said Oleh Baturin, a local journalist. “Kherson is a big city and there aren't that many soldiers. It is easier for them to take control of the villages; they are defenseless.”

On April 19, Russian forces opened fire on the villages of Velyka Oleksandrivka and Rybalche, killing civilians and damaging homes, the Kherson Region Prosecutor's Office reported. A week earlier, Russian

troops shot dead seven people in a residential building in the village of Pravdyne. “After that, intending to cover up the crime, the occupier blew up the house with the bodies of the executed people” inside, the report said.

Russian soldiers have also kidnapped local activists, journalists and war veterans, according to Kolykhaiev, the Kherson mayor, who said more than 200 people have been abducted.

Among them was Baturin, who was seized near his home in Kakhovka, 60 miles (90 kilometers) east of Kherson. The journalist was meeting an acquaintance from another village when a group of Russian soldiers attacked him at the train station. They held him in isolation for a week, Baturin said, interrogating him every day; the soldiers asked for the names of organizers of anti-occupation protests, as well as local soldiers and veterans. From other cells, he could hear sounds of torture.

After his release he fled the occupied territory with his family.

“If I had stayed, I am absolutely certain they would come for me again,” Baturin said, speaking by phone last week from Ukrainian-controlled territory after his escape.

Fesenko, the analyst, says the referendum plan indicates Russia’s intention to occupy the region long-term.

“In Crimea and Donbas, Russia had the support of the local population, but this is not the case in the south of Ukraine, where Ukrainians want to live in Ukraine. And this means that in the event of a long-term occupation, Russia risks facing a broad partisan movement,” Fesenko said.

During the first weeks of occupation, thousands of protesters gathered daily on Kherson’s main square, draped in Ukrainian flags and holding signs proclaiming, “This is Ukraine.” Videos on social media showed people screaming at Russia’s tanks and heavily armed soldiers. The protests are now held weekly. On Wednesday, Russian troops used tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the protesters.

Olga, the teacher, regularly takes part. Previously a Russian speaker, she now refuses to utter the language. “I will never be able to communicate with Russians ever again. How can I feel about people who bomb maternity hospitals and children?” she said. “We were flourishing — and now they have ruined our lives.”

Mayor Kolykhaiev said that after the warnings about a Russian referendum and mobilization there has been a panicked rush to leave. “The queues of people who want to leave our city have grown to five kilometers,” he said, adding that around a third of the city’s pre-war population of 284,000 has fled.

Following Zelenskyy’s address to the nation, Olga sent a WhatsApp message to the AP: “The situation in Kherson is tense. My family and I want to leave ... but now the Russian soldiers don’t allow it at all. It’s becoming more and more dangerous here.”

Late Monday night, Kolykhaiev wrote on Facebook that armed Russian soldiers had entered the Kherson City Council building, took away the keys and replaced the guards with their own.

On Tuesday, the mayor posted again, saying he had refused to cooperate with the new administration appointed by the Russian regional military commander, Oleksandr Kobets.

“I am staying in Kherson with the people of Kherson,” he wrote. “I am with you.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 EU leaders: Russia gas cutoff as ‘blackmail’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/european-leaders-blast-cutoff-russian-gas-blackmail-84362302

POKROVSK, Ukraine -- European leaders blasted Russia's decision to cut natural gas shipments to Poland and Bulgaria as "blackmail," saying the cutoff and the Kremlin's warning that it might cease shipments to other countries is a failed attempt to divide the West over its support for Ukraine.

Russia's move Wednesday to use its most essential export as leverage marked a dramatic escalation in the economic war of sanctions and countersanctions that has unfolded in parallel to the fighting on the battlefield.

The tactic against the two EU and NATO members could eventually force targeted nations to ration gas and deal another blow to economies suffering from rising prices. At the same time, it could deprive Russia of badly needed income to fund its war effort.

Poland has been a major gateway for the delivery of weapons to Ukraine and confirmed this week that it is sending the country tanks. Just hours before Russia's state energy giant Gazprom acted, Poland announced a new set of sanctions against the company and other Russian businesses and oligarchs.

Bulgaria, under a new liberal government that took office last fall, has cut many of its old ties to Moscow and likewise supported punitive measures against the Kremlin. It has also hosted Western fighter jets at a new NATO outpost on Bulgaria's Black Sea coast.

The gas cuts do not immediately put the two countries in any dire trouble. Poland, especially, has been working for many years to line up other suppliers, and the continent is heading into summer, making gas less essential for households.

Also, Russian gas deliveries to both Poland and Bulgaria were expected to end later this year anyway.

Still, the cutoff and the Kremlin warning that other countries could be next sent shivers of worry through the 27-nation European Union. Germany, the largest economy on the continent, and Italy are among Europe's biggest consumers of Russian natural gas, though they, too, have been taking steps to reduce their dependence on Moscow.

"It comes as no surprise that the Kremlin uses fossil fuels to try to blackmail us," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. "Today, the Kremlin failed once again in his attempt to sow division amongst member states. The era of Russian fossil fuel in Europe is coming to an end."

Gazprom said it shut off the two countries because they refused to pay in rubles, as President Vladimir Putin has demanded of "unfriendly" nations. The Kremlin said other countries may be cut off if they don't agree to the payment arrangement.

Most European countries have publicly balked at Russia's demand for rubles, but it is not clear how many have actually faced the moment of decision so far. Greece's next scheduled payment to Gazprom is due on May 25, for example, and the government must decide then whether to comply.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki told his country's parliament that he believes Poland's support for Ukraine — and the new sanctions imposed by Warsaw on Tuesday — were the real reasons behind the gas cutoff.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov called the suspension blackmail, adding: "We will not succumb to such a racket."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia views gas as a weapon for political blackmail and "sees a united Europe as a target."

On the battlefield, fighting continued in the country's east along a largely static front line some 300 miles (480 kilometers) long.

Russia claimed its missiles hit a batch of weapons that the U.S. and European nations had delivered to Ukraine. One person was killed and at least two were injured when rockets hit a residential neighborhood in Kharkiv.

Western officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence findings, said Russia has made slow progress in the eastern Donbas region, with “minor gains,” including the capture of villages and small towns south of Izyum and on the outskirts of Rubizhne.

Serhiy Haidai, the governor of the Luhansk region, conceded that Russia has made some progress in its advance on Rubizhne through its nearly constant bombardment, but that Ukrainian troops are fighting back and retreating only when there is nothing left to defend.

“There is no point in staying on territory that has been fired on so often that every meter is well known,” he said.

Maxim, a Ukrainian tank commander in the Donbas who didn't give his last name, offered his rationale for why Ukrainian forces have been able to hold back the better-equipped Russian army: “The strength is not in the tank; the strength is in the people.”

The Western officials said some Russian troops have been shifted from the gutted southern port city of Mariupol to other parts of the Donbas. But some remain in Mariupol to fight Ukrainian forces holed up at the Azovstal steel plant, the last stronghold in the city. About 1,000 civilians were said to be taking shelter there with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian defenders.

“The situation is very difficult. There are huge problems with water, food,” Serhii Volynskyi, commander of the marine unit inside the plant, said in a Facebook video message. He said hundreds of fighters and civilians were wounded and in need of medical help, and those inside included children, older people and disabled people.

In the Black Sea port city of Kherson, which Russian forces have occupied since early in the war, a series of explosions boomed late Wednesday near the television tower and at least temporarily knocked Russian channels off the air, Ukrainian and Russian news organizations reported.

Just across the border from the Donbas in Russia, an ammunition depot in the Belgorod region burned after several explosions were heard, the governor said. Blasts were also reported in Russia's Kursk region near the border, and authorities in Russia's Voronezh region said an air defense system shot down a drone.

Earlier this week, an oil storage facility in the Russian city of Bryansk was engulfed by fire.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak hinted at the country's involvement in the fires, saying in a Telegram post that “karma (is) a harsh thing.”

With the help of Western arms, Ukrainian forces managed to thwart Russian forces' attempt to storm Kyiv. Moscow now says its focus is the capture of the Donbas, Ukraine's mostly Russian-speaking industrial heartland.

A defiant Putin vowed Russia will achieve its military goals, telling parliament, “All the tasks of the special military operation we are conducting in the Donbas and Ukraine, launched on Feb. 24, will be unconditionally fulfilled.”

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HEADLINE	04/28 Germany top buyer Russia energy amid war
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/report-germany-top-buyer-russian-energy-war-began-84356847

GIST	<p>BERLIN -- Germany was the biggest buyer of Russian energy during the first two months of the war in Ukraine, an independent research group said Thursday.</p> <p>A study published by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air calculates that Russia has earned 63 billion euros (\$66.5 billion) from fossil fuel exports since Feb. 24, the date Russian troops attacked Ukraine.</p> <p>Using data on ship movements, real-time tracking of gas flows through pipelines and estimates based on historical monthly trade, the researchers reckoned Germany alone paid Russia about 9.1 billion euros for fossil fuel deliveries — mostly natural gas — in the first two months of the war.</p> <p>Claudia Kemfert, a senior energy expert at the German Institute for Economic Research who was not involved in the study, said the figures were plausible given the recent sharp increase in prices for fossil fuels. Last year, Germany paid about 100 billion euros in total for imports of oil, coal and gas — a quarter of which went to Russia, she said.</p> <p>The German government said it couldn't comment on estimates and declined to provide any figures of its own, saying these would need to come from companies that procure the energy supplies.</p> <p>Germany has faced strong criticism for its reliance on Russian fossil fuels despite warnings from allies that this could endanger its own and European security. Then-Chancellor Angela Merkel pushed back last year against U.S. efforts to halt a Russian gas pipeline to Germany, a decision strongly backed by her successor, Olaf Scholz, whose Social Democratic Party have long advocated energy cooperation with Russia.</p> <p>The pipeline was only frozen by Scholz's new center-left government shortly before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It has since scrambled to find alternative energy supplies, particularly for Russian natural gas, which now accounts for 35% of Germany's total imports.</p> <p>Kemfert said a recent pledge by the German government to produce electricity only from renewable sources by 2035 was welcome.</p> <p>"But as long as Germany continues to buy fossil fuels, whether from Russia or other autocracies, it undermines both its own credibility and its energy security," she said.</p> <p>The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, which is based in Finland and funded through grants and research contracts, said the second biggest importer of Russia fossil fuels in the two months since the outbreak of war was Italy (6.9 billion euros), followed by China (6.7 billion euros).</p> <p>South Korea, Japan, India and the United States also purchased Russian energy after the start of the war, though significantly less than the European Union. As a whole, the 27-nation bloc accounted for 71% of Russia's total income from oil, gas and coal, worth approximately 44 billion euros, the CREA report found said.</p> <p>Lauri Myllyvirta, the group's lead analyst, said year-on-year comparisons were difficult, but he estimated that Russia's exports to Europe in the same period of 2021 were worth 18 billion euros.</p> <p>"So 44 billion euros (...) represents a doubling from last year," he said. "The main driver is that market prices for gas rose from around 10 euros per MWh a year ago to above 100."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Israel halts, standstill for Holocaust day
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/israel-halts-holocaust-day-honors-million-jews-killed-84364146

GIST	<p>TEL AVIV, Israel -- Sirens blared across Israel early Thursday as the country came to a standstill in an annual ritual honoring the 6 million Jews murdered during the Holocaust.</p> <p>People halted where they were walking, and drivers stopped their cars to get out of the vehicles as people bowed their heads in memory of the victims of the Nazi genocide. Ceremonies were planned throughout the day at Israel's national Holocaust memorial, parliament and elsewhere.</p> <p>Israel was founded in 1948 as a sanctuary for Jews in the wake of the Holocaust. About 165,000 survivors live in Israel, a dwindling population that is widely honored but struggling with poverty.</p> <p>Ushering in Holocaust memorial day at Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett late Wednesday called on the world to stop comparing the Holocaust to other events in history. He spoke after the presidents of both Ukraine and Russia drew parallels between their ongoing war and the genocide during World War II.</p> <p>"As the years go by, there is more and more discourse in the world that compares other difficult events to the Holocaust. But no," he said. "No event in history, cruel as it may have been, is comparable to the extermination of Europe's Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators."</p> <p>He also warned the country against allowing its deep differences to tear the nation apart. The speech, coming on one of Israel's most solemn days of the year, came in a deeply personal context as well. On Tuesday, his family received a letter with a live bullet and a death threat. Israeli authorities tightened security around the premier and his family and were investigating.</p> <p>"My brothers and sisters, we cannot, we simply cannot allow the same dangerous gene of factionalism dismantle Israel from within," Bennett said.</p> <p>Israel makes great effort to memorialize the victims of the Holocaust and make heroes of those who survived. Restaurants and places of entertainment remain closed on Holocaust memorial day, radios play somber music and TV stations devote their programming to documentaries and other Holocaust-related material.</p> <p>For them, challenges loom. This year's ceremony comes as Israel and much of the world emerges from the coronavirus pandemic, which confronted Holocaust survivors in particular with increased health risks as well as widespread loneliness and despair.</p> <p>Additionally, about a third of Israel's Holocaust survivors live below the poverty line, with many sustained by government stipends and donations, according to a group that represents survivors.</p> <p>Despite their experience and widespread education programs, antisemitism rose worldwide during the pandemic, according to a report released Wednesday.</p> <p>It pinned the fuel for the anti-Jewish surge on lockdowns, social media and a backlash against Israel's punishing air raids on the Gaza Strip during last year's 11-day war.</p> <p>In addition to speeches by Bennett, Israeli President Isaac Herzog and others, Wednesday's ceremony featured survivors lighting six torches — for the 6 million murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. The speaker of Germany's parliament, Baerbel Bas, also attended as a special guest.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Iran: more military cooperation with China
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iran-seeks-expand-military-cooperation-china-84343541
GIST	TEHRAN, Iran -- Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi expressed Wednesday his government's desire for closer cooperation with China in remarks made during a visit by the Chinese defense minister, state media reported.

According to the report, Raisi told China's Minister of National Defense Wei Fenghe that Tehran sees its ties with Beijing as strategic. Closer cooperation would serve to confront what the Iranian president described as U.S. unilateralism as talks to revive Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers have stalled.

"Confronting unilateralism and creating stability and order is possible through cooperation of independent and like-minded powers," Raisi was quoted as saying.

Wei in turn said improving ties between Iran and China would provide security, "particularly in the current critical and tense situation."

Wei also met with his Iranian counterpart, Gen. Mohammad Reza Ashtinai, and reportedly invited him to visit China, as well as with other Iranian military officials.

The official IRNA news agency quoted Ashtiani as assailing U.S. military presence in the Middle East and elsewhere, claiming that "wherever the U.S. has had military presence, it has created waves of insecurity, instability, rifts, pessimism, war, destruction and displacement."

Wei said his visit was aimed at "improving the strategic defense cooperation" between Iran and China — cooperation that he said would have a "remarkable" impact in defusing unilateralism and fighting terrorism.

Iran and China have increased their military ties in recent years, with their navies visiting each other's ports and holding joint naval drills in the Indian Ocean.

In 2021, Iran and China signed a 25-year strategic cooperation agreement that covered a variety of economic activities from oil and mining to promoting industrial activity in Iran, as well as transportation and agricultural collaborations.

China is a signatory to the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, along with Russia, Britain, France and Germany.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Protesters shut down Michigan city meeting
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/protesters-shut-city-meeting-demanding-justice-patrick-lyoya/story?id=84343199
GIST	<p>Protesters shut down a Grand Rapids City Commission meeting on Tuesday, demanding justice for Patrick Lyoya, who was shot and killed by a Michigan police officer earlier this month.</p> <p>During the commission's public comment period, several people took to the stand to call for police accountability. As protesters began to shout, Mayor Rosalynn Bliss said the commission will be taking a recess, an online recording of the meeting shows.</p> <p>Bliss adjourned the meeting as the commotion continued, a spokesperson for the city told ABC News. Commissioners and most city staff left the chambers about five to 10 minutes later, according to local outlet MLive.</p> <p>Grand Rapids Police Chief Eric Winstrom later took questions from protesters, who largely voiced their concerns, according to MLive. The meeting ended at 9 p.m. and Winstrom stayed to speak with residents until nearly 11 p.m., according to the spokesperson. Protesters left peacefully and no arrests were made, the spokesperson added.</p> <p>Winstrom told FOX17 he was not surprised by what had happened at the meeting.</p> <p>"I've been in this situation before, where, people want to scream and yell," said Winstrom. "It looked to me like it was a group of people who wanted to vent."</p>

	<p>Winstrom added, "Sometimes people want to sit at the table, the seat at the table, they want their voice to be heard and they want to have a discussion and then other times they just want to vent. It sounded to me after the first couple of speakers people just wanted to scream and yell."</p> <p>Lyoya, 26, was shot by an officer following a struggle outside a house after he was pulled over for a faulty license plate, according to body cam footage and police.</p> <p>Amid the struggle, the officer was able to force Lyoya to the ground, shouting, "Stop resisting," "Let go" and "Drop the Taser" before he shot Lyoya in the back of the head, according to video footage.</p> <p>Earlier this week, police named Christopher Schurr as the officer who shot Lyoya.</p> <p>Protesters are demanding that Schurr be arrested and officers get their own liability insurance. They also want Kent County prosecutor Chris Becker to remove himself from deciding whether to charge Schurr, according to MLive.</p> <p>Grand Rapids Police did not immediately respond to ABC News' request for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 US security 'assurances' upset Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/nato-nuclear-war-risk-russia-us-ukraine-1701338?
GIST	<p>Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland perturbed Ukrainians last week when she said the U.S. is negotiating future "security assurances" for Kyiv, using the same terminology as the 1994 Budapest Memorandum under which Ukraine surrendered its nuclear arsenal in exchange for the hollow Western and Russian promise of protection.</p> <p>Ukrainian leaders are demanding legally-binding security guarantees as part of any deal that ends the current Russian invasion of the country. Absent NATO membership and admission into the alliance's Article 5 collective defense umbrella—which appears unlikely—Kyiv argues this is the only way to deter yet more Russian aggression.</p> <p>Nuland's interview with the Ukrainian <i>Evropeiska Pravda</i> newspaper was not received well in Kyiv, according to current and former Ukrainian officials and politicians who spoke with <i>Newsweek</i>.</p> <p>She told <i>Evropeiska Pravda</i>: "Negotiations are ongoing between governments that are not public, and I can only say that the United States is negotiating with Kyiv about the security assurances that Ukraine can receive."</p> <p>Pushed on whether this meant "assurance" or "guarantees," Nuland responded: "I said exactly as I said. That's all I can say publicly."</p> <p><i>Newsweek</i> has contacted the State Department to request comment.</p> <p>Ghost of Budapest The ghost of the Budapest Memorandum hangs over modern Ukraine.</p> <p>A source close to Zelensky, who spoke with <i>Newsweek</i> on the condition of anonymity, warned that the government would not sign a new deal similar to the failed memorandum, which offered vague "assurances" interpreted by the newly-independent Ukraine as genuine security guarantees.</p> <p>"Ukraine wants any new agreement to be meaningful and one that decades from now people will be calling a great success and not ridiculing as a failure," the source told <i>Newsweek</i>.</p>

Oleksandr Merezhko, a member of Ukraine's Rada parliament and the chair of its foreign policy committee, told *Newsweek* his country would not make the same mistake it made in 1994, regardless of any external pressure.

"Ukraine has already learned this lesson the hard way, and will hardly agree to be given again 'assurances' instead of firm and clear guarantees," Merezhko said.

"I'm not sure whether the U.S. is ready to give us guarantees," Merezhko added. "I'm not surprised why they are hesitant, but we need to persuade them. We just cannot afford to have a Budapest Memorandum 2."

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a turning point in modern political history. Iuliia Mendel, who previously served as Zelensky's press secretary and retains close links with Ukrainian officials, told *Newsweek* that a new deal must reflect a changed political reality.

"What Ukraine wants is a change of the approach towards global security," Mendel said.

"It is clear that the well-established system of security guaranteed by documents with possibly false—as we see in the case of Russia—signatures, jovial smiles, and firm handshakes on camera are no longer relevant.

"Earlier agreements do not respond to the informational dynamics or to modern hybrid methods of warfare. Ukraine wants a security system that is effective. We hope for real instruments to face real challenges. One cannot fight the war with papers."

Russia was one of the signatories of the Budapest Memorandum, another reason Ukrainians say the agreement was worthless in the event of aggression from Moscow.

"After we gave up the nukes, they were supposed to protect our territorial integrity," Yevheniia Kravchuk, the deputy head of Zelensky's Servant of the People faction in Ukraine's Rada parliament, told *Newsweek*.

"Right now the government is negotiating these security issues and the security document with other countries, and it's very early to talk about the contents.

"First, we need to be sure that the Western world, civilized world, will be supplying Ukraine with weapons and building up our defensive military [capabilities] even after the war ends.

"They can invade again in two years, or three years. We need to be prepared for this, together with our partners in the West."

Mykhailo Podoliak, adviser to the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, said this weekend he hoped that security guarantee discussions with Western partners would produce results soon.

"We do not want to get Minsk 3, for example, to have a conflict with Russia again in a couple of years," Podoliak said, referring to the two Minsk agreements that ended fighting in Donbas in 2014 and 2015 but failed to reach a final peace deal to settle the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The security guarantee dispute is one of few between Kyiv and Washington, D.C. In recent weeks, the U.S. had led the expansion of Western support for Ukraine as Russia seeks a much-needed victory in the eastern Donbas region.

[The U.S. is providing advanced and heavy weapons](#) while pressing its NATO allies to do the same. Meanwhile, the U.S. is reportedly providing invaluable intelligence support to Ukrainian military units helping them protect key assets and hunt Russian targets.

Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) and Secretary of Defense [Lloyd Austin](#) traveled to Kyiv this week to meet President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#) and underscore continued close cooperation between the U.S. and Ukraine.

The source close to Zelensky said Kyiv was very happy with the American visit. U.S. diplomats are also now returning to Ukraine, having left the country in the days leading up to the Russian invasion.

The high-level trip to Kyiv was followed by Tuesday's NATO-Ukraine conference at the U.S. Ramstein airbase in Germany, which Austin said would be the first of monthly meetings of a new "Contact Group" consisting of NATO nations and their non-alliance partners.

"The Contact Group will be a vehicle for nations of goodwill to intensify our efforts, coordinate our assistance, and focus on winning today's fight and the struggles to come," Austin said.

He added: "I know that all the leaders leave today more resolved than ever to support Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression and atrocities."

Nuclear Threat

The U.S. and its NATO allies remain wary of being dragged into direct conflict with Russia given the [risk of serious, even nuclear, escalation](#).

Legally-binding security guarantees for Ukraine would put leading NATO nations one step from war with Russia. Ukraine's desired guarantee has been compared to NATO's Article 5, which obliges member states to come to the military defense of an ally under external attack.

Ukraine and its partners are discussing the details of security guarantees. A French official told Reuters that a guarantee might look more like the [European Union](#)'s mutual defense clause than NATO's Article 5.

"It would be military supplies so that it can deal with a new attack or, possibly, guarantees that would see us get involved if Ukraine is attacked in a way where we could assess how to assist it," the official said.

France and Germany have expressed willingness to provide such guarantees. The U.S. and U.K. have been more hesitant. Zelensky and his officials have at times also touted Turkey, Israel, and others as possible security guarantors, though the backing of NATO's most powerful militaries is paramount.

President [Joe Biden](#) has repeatedly said no American troops will fight in Ukraine due to the danger of escalation, though there have been unconfirmed reports of Western covert units operating inside the country.

In March, the president said: "We will not fight a war against Russia in Ukraine. Direct conflict between NATO and Russia is World War III, something we must strive to prevent."

British Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab told [BBC](#) Radio in March that the U.K. has similar reservations.

"We have been very clear we are not going to engage Russia in direct military confrontation," Raab said when asked if London was ready to provide Ukraine with a security guarantee. "Ukraine is not a NATO member," he added.

Moscow has always framed its fight with Ukraine as a conflict with NATO and the U.S. As the war drags on, the demarcation line between Ukrainian troops and their Western partners is blurring.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said this week: "NATO, in essence, is engaged in a war with Russia through a proxy and is arming that proxy. War means war."

A host of NATO nations are now providing potent small arms, armored vehicles, artillery, anti-aircraft systems, and spare parts for aircraft, among other vital military supplies. Russian officials have repeatedly said they plan to destroy such NATO supplies in transit.

The U.S is also believed to be providing intelligence to assist Ukrainian battle plans and high-value target strikes, while a British defense minister said this week that London would support Ukraine using British weapons to attack targets inside Russian borders.

Russian threats of escalation with NATO appeared to hinder early Western assistance for Ukraine. But Moscow's military failings, Kyiv's determined resistance, and the atrocities committed by Russian troops in occupied areas have all galvanized international support.

While Western officials initially believed Kyiv could fall within days, they are now openly discussing a possible Ukrainian victory and how to weaken Russia in the longer term.

"We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine," Austin said this week.

Putin's Conscience

Rapprochement with Russia under Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) now appears unthinkable for NATO nations.

[Finland and Sweden](#) are preparing to abandon traditional neutrality and join the transatlantic alliance despite Russian threats of retaliation.

Russia's economy is isolated, Western nations rapidly divesting from its lucrative energy exports and tightening the screws on its elites abroad whose dirty money and Kremlin links were long tolerated.

Serious divisions remain in the West, and Putin can still count on powerful friends in China, India, South America, and elsewhere. But the invasion of Ukraine is drawing a new political map on which Western democracies have more mortal motivation than at any point since the 9/11 attacks.

"The whole world suffers from this Russian war against the democratic order: Some militarily, some financially, some lose access to energy resources, hunger increases somewhere—this war affects the entire world economy," Mendel said.

"If the most influential people of the world engage in PR instead of building an effective modern security system, if they hide behind empty promises and shirk political responsibility, then the question of survival will be not only for Ukraine but for the whole world.

"With threats of a nuclear war, with an unpredictable and aggressive dictator trying to enslave almost half the world—look at the size of post-Soviet territory—there is no hope that Putin will abruptly start respecting the law and the Western world order, or that his conscience will awaken."

She added: "It must be made clear that aggression carries penalties, and the next aggression must be made truly impossible. Ukraine does not need the new old memorandums, which in a few years will not prevent the seizure of our territories and brutal abuse and murder."

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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia disinformation; 'Victory Day' looms
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ramps-war-disinformation-victory-day-looms-1701528?
GIST	Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kremlin officials have increasingly made threatening statements to NATO as a strategic tactic as the Ukraine war enters its third month, according to experts.

During a Wednesday speech, Putin said any countries that intervene in Russian military operations in Ukraine and create "unacceptable threats for us that are strategic in nature" would be met with a "lightning-fast" response, Agence France-Presse reported.

This came after Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in a Monday interview with state media that "NATO is essentially going to war with Russia through a proxy and arming that proxy." In another example of incendiary comments, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said during an April 13 interview that Russia will consider U.S. and NATO vehicles transporting weapons on Ukrainian territory as "[legitimate military targets](#)."

Recently, the [British defense ministry](#) said in an intelligence update that there was reason to believe Russia was feeling a sense of urgency about ending its war in Ukraine before it celebrates Victory Day next month. The annual commemoration on May 9 marks the Russian defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 and the end of World War II in Europe.

During a press briefing last week, White House press secretary [Jen Psaki](#) was asked about Russian warnings that the U.S. must stop arming Ukraine or risk "unpredictable consequences." Psaki demurred from commenting, saying, "I'm not going to speculate on empty threats or threats by President Putin or by Russian leadership."

Jonathan Katz, the director of Democracy Initiatives and a senior fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States, said that while such threats are taken [very seriously](#) by the U.S. and NATO—which is why troop levels have increased in countries near Ukraine—Russia's threats are strategic and part of the Kremlin's "war of disinformation."

"Russia has long had in its arsenal efforts to impact information through disinformation," Katz told *Newsweek*.

Laurence Reardon, an associate professor of political science at the University of New Hampshire, said he feels Russia's statements are a response to the strong international support Ukraine has received.

"I think Putin has underestimated the resolve of NATO, the [EU](#) and the U.S. to support Ukraine," Reardon said. "Putin hopes that his threats of a wider war will weaken the alliance, who will 'tire' of the war after a couple of months, just like they tired of the Russian invasion in 2014. So I think Putin is undertaking a psychological war to unnerve the West."

William Reno, a professor of political science at Northwestern University, pointed out that Russia is not the only country turning to strategic statements.

"Both sides can't rely solely on military force to get what they want because that risks ending in nuclear war. But the risk of a species-ending event is an instrument of this diplomacy on both sides. That puts the onus on state leaders to know how to use force persuasively," Reno said.

He added that Russia making allusions to its nuclear arsenal and Lavrov calling NATO's actions a proxy war "is Russia's way of telling NATO there is a risk that Russia will use more force. Statements of U.S. officials that Russia is losing, and public plans to send heavy weaponry, signals to Russia that it faces risk if its forces remain in Ukraine."

Reno continued, "Taken together, this is the manipulation of risk. The power to hurt the adversary is bargaining power.... Deterrence at its heart is about coercion and intimidation. Neither side wants to build up for an attack that will actually happen. The risk of mutual destruction is too great."

Katz said Putin also has current and potential economic and political partners in mind with his aggressive statements and claims about NATO.

	<p>"I think from the perspective of Moscow, they want to build a case that this whole thing was started by NATO and the United States," Katz said. With economic sanctions decimating Russia's economy, Putin may hope countries looking to buy energy supplies and other goods "might buy the line that Moscow is peddling."</p> <p>"Then you also have the domestic implications of what he is saying, which is really important," Katz noted. Putin is "using the boogeyman of NATO, of the United States, to justify the actions that he is taking to the Russian domestic population."</p> <p>Katz added that such verbal tactics, as well as the spread of misinformation through cyber means, have long been in Russia's "playbook."</p> <p>"Thankfully, the thing that Putin didn't count on was trans-Atlantic unity to remain in the way that it has," Katz said.</p> <p><i>Newsweek</i> reached out to the Russian Foreign Ministry for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Beijing warns Japan: relations crossroads
SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/china-japan-relations-crossroads-beijings-093000084.html
GIST	<p>Strained Sino-Japanese relations could worsen further if Tokyo continues to treat Beijing as a rival and fails to turn around increasingly hostile public opinion, the Chinese envoy to Japan has warned.</p> <p>In a virtual speech to more than 100 Japanese entrepreneurs on Tuesday, Chinese ambassador Kong Xuanyou also indicated Beijing's frustration with the administration of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida over its close alignment with Washington on China.</p> <p>"If some people in Japan are obsessed with a narrow geopolitical vision and the Cold War mentality of confrontation between camps, they will naturally dislike China and regard China as a threat or even an enemy, and embark on the wrong path of pitting itself against its neighbours," Kong said, according to a statement on the embassy website.</p> <p>The state of bilateral ties was "far from ideal, with prominent issues both old and new intertwined with each other", Kong told a seminar hosted by the Japan-China Investment Promotion Organization to mark the 50th anniversary of normalisation of Sino-Japanese relations.</p> <p>"We are at a crossroads where we either forge ahead or retreat," he warned.</p> <p>Beijing initially viewed Prime Minister Kishida, who came to power last October, as more dovish than his conservative predecessors Yoshihide Suga and Shinzo Abe. But nearly seven months into his term, bilateral ties have shown few signs of improvement, with Tokyo edging closer to Washington in its alliance-based approach to counter China's rise.</p> <p>High-level bilateral exchanges have largely been suspended, with Kishida talking to Chinese President Xi Jinping only once over the telephone since he took office.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Japan followed the US and Australia in sending a delegation to the Solomon Islands, to voice concerns about the Pacific nation's security pact with China amid fears about the building of a Chinese military base there.</p> <p>Tokyo has also played a pivotal role in Washington's China-focused Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad, a US-led four-way grouping with India and Australia slammed by Beijing as an "Asian Nato".</p> <p>In his speech, Kong took particular issue with "deep ideological prejudice in Japanese public opinion" towards China and made a veiled swipe at the US.</p>

"There are fewer positive voices promoting cooperation, but more negative views advocating toughness against China. It can be attributed to misunderstanding and misperceptions of China in Japan, but it is to a large extent due to external influences," he said.

Kong listed three main areas he believed had seen Tokyo move towards an increasingly antagonistic approach on Beijing, namely, how to view their different political systems; how to balance competition and cooperation; and how to assess China's role in the world.

Beijing's top diplomat to Japan also sought to play down growing concerns about China's authoritarian turn at home and diplomatic assertiveness abroad, portraying the country as a benign, responsible power on global affairs, including on the [Ukraine war](#).

He dismissed growing criticism, mostly from the West, of China's self-claimed neutral stand on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and lashed out at similar attempts in Japan to compare China and Russia and use the Ukraine crisis to advocate support for Taiwan.

The Chinese foreign ministry has condemned Abe on several occasions over his recent appeals for the US to drop its decades-old strategic ambiguity on the defence of self-ruled Taiwan, which Beijing considers breakaway territory to be reunited by force if necessary.

Beijing was also unhappy with Kishida over sending a ritual offering "in a private capacity" last week to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, a symbol of Japan's past militarism. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin responded by urging Japanese politicians to reflect on their country's "wrong attitude toward its own history of aggression" and "take concrete actions to win the trust of its Asian neighbours and the international community."

This comes as the Ukraine war prompts a shift in Japanese public opinion to favour a stronger military, with 55 per cent of respondents agreeing that national defence spending should be raised to 2 per cent of GDP or more, according to a survey last week by the *Nikkei* newspaper.

In his speech, Kong also appealed to Japanese businesspeople to help ease the bilateral tensions, describing mutual trade ties as "interdependent and inseparable".

According to Kong, there are over 30,000 Japanese companies operating in China, with a total investment of more than US\$120 billion. Sino-Japanese trade volume accounts for nearly a quarter of Japan's total foreign trade, about the same as its combined trade volume with the US and European Union.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	04/27 Log4Shell top vulnerability of 2021
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/log4shell-ranked-top-exploited-vulnerability-of-2021-by-agencies/
GIST	<p>The top exploited vulnerability of 2021 was the Log4Shell affecting Apache's Log4j library that was disclosed in December and achieved "rapid widespread exploitation," demonstrating "the ability of malicious actors to quickly weaponize known vulnerabilities and target organizations before they patch," according to a new multinational assessment.</p> <p>The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), National Security Agency (NSA), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC), Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), New Zealand National Cyber Security Centre (NZ NCSC), and United Kingdom's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC-UK) co-authored an advisory released today detailing the top 15 Common Vulnerabilities and Exposures (CVEs) along with other vulnerabilities routinely exploited by malicious cyber actors.</p>

The cyber agencies assessed that “malicious cyber actors aggressively targeted newly disclosed critical software vulnerabilities against broad target sets, including public and private sector organizations worldwide.”

“Globally, in 2021, malicious cyber actors targeted internet-facing systems, such as email servers and virtual private network (VPN) servers, with exploits of newly disclosed vulnerabilities,” the advisory said. “For most of the top exploited vulnerabilities, researchers or other actors released proof of concept (POC) code within two weeks of the vulnerability’s disclosure, likely facilitating exploitation by a broader range of malicious actors.”

“To a lesser extent, malicious cyber actors continued to exploit publicly known, dated software vulnerabilities—some of which were also [routinely exploited in 2020](#) or earlier,” the agencies continued. “The exploitation of older vulnerabilities demonstrates the continued risk to organizations that fail to patch software in a timely manner or are using software that is no longer supported by a vendor.”

Following the Log4j vulnerability — remote code execution that enables an attacker to take over a system to swipe data or launch ransomware — was the critical vulnerability affecting [Zoho ManageEngine ADSelfService Plus](#) reported in September.

Then come three ProxyShell vulnerabilities that affected Microsoft Exchange email servers with elevation of privilege, remote code execution, and security feature bypass attacks. “Successful exploitation of these vulnerabilities in combination enables a remote actor to execute arbitrary code,” the advisory said. “These vulnerabilities reside within the Microsoft Client Access Service (CAS), which typically runs on port 443 in Microsoft Internet Information Services (IIS) (e.g., Microsoft’s web server). CAS is commonly exposed to the internet to enable users to access their email via mobile devices and web browsers.”

Following that came the ProxyLogon targeting Microsoft Exchange Server with remote code execution.

“Successful exploitation of these vulnerabilities in combination (i.e., ‘vulnerability chaining’) allows an unauthenticated cyber actor to execute arbitrary code on vulnerable Exchange Servers, which, in turn, enables the actor to gain persistent access to files and mailboxes on the servers, as well as to credentials stored on the servers,” the advisory continued. “Successful exploitation may additionally enable the cyber actor to compromise trust and identity in a vulnerable network.”

Next was the arbitrary code execution vulnerability affecting the Atlassian Confluence Server and Data Center that saw attempted mass exploitation in September. “This vulnerability quickly became one of the most routinely exploited vulnerabilities after a POC was released within a week of its disclosure,” the agencies noted.

Rounding out the list was the remote code execution vulnerability targeting [VMware vSphere Client](#), the ZeroLogon vulnerability affecting [Microsoft Netlogon Remote Protocol \(MS-NRPC\)](#), the [Microsoft Exchange Memory Corruption Vulnerability](#), the arbitrary file reading vulnerability targeting [Pulse Secure Pulse Connect Secure](#), and the path traversal vulnerability targeting [Fortinet FortiOS and FortiProxy](#).

Three of the year’s top vulnerabilities — ZeroLogon, Fortinet FortiOS and FortiProxy, and Pulse Secure Pulse Connect Secure — were also routinely exploited in 2020. “Their continued exploitation indicates that many organizations fail to patch software in a timely manner and remain vulnerable to malicious cyber actors,” agencies reiterated.

The advisory includes an additional list of vulnerabilities routinely exploited by malicious cyber actors in 2021, with multiple vulnerabilities affecting internet-facing systems including Accellion File Transfer Appliance (FTA), Windows Print Spooler, and Pulse Secure Pulse Connect Secure.

	<p>Organizations are urged to apply mitigation recommendations in the advisory, including “applying timely patches to systems and implementing a centralized patch management system to reduce the risk of compromise by malicious cyber actors.”</p> <p>Recommendations include replacing software that is no longer supported by the vendor, enforcing multifactor authentication “for all users, without exception,” properly configuring and securing internet-facing network devices, and implementing vendor-approved workarounds if a patch for a known exploited or critical vulnerability cannot be quickly applied.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Long-running NKorea operation
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/north-korea-hackers-stonefly-symantec/
GIST	<p>An unnamed engineering company with energy and military customers was recently the target of a North Korean hacking group that has been operating since at least 2009, researchers said Wednesday.</p> <p>The Threat Hunter Team at Symantec said the attackers breached the organization in February, probably by using the Log4j vulnerability “on a public-facing VMware View server.” Symantec is attributing the activity to Stonefly, which is also known as DarkSeoul, Operation Troy, Silent Chollima and BlackMine.</p> <p>Researchers have associated some of Stonefly’s activity with North Korea’s infamous Lazarus Group hackers, who typically deal in high-value cybercrime but also have been linked to cyber-espionage.</p> <p>In this case, Symantec said Stonefly is sticking with a trend first spotted in 2019: The group prefers “mounting highly selective targeted attacks against targets that could yield intelligence to assist strategically important sectors such as energy, aerospace, and military equipment.”</p> <p>After the attackers breached the system, they compromised 18 other computers, installing a new version of their “Preft” backdoor and spreading open-source tools for malicious uses, the researchers said. Those included the publicly available 3proxy, WinSCP and Invoke-TheHash.</p> <p>Ultimately, Stonefly “also deployed what appears to be a custom developed information stealer (infostealer),” Symantec said. That malware creates ZIP files, but it’s unclear if they were ever collected.</p> <p>“It is possible that the exfiltration functionality was removed and the attackers planned to use an alternative means of exfiltration,” the researchers said.</p> <p>The researchers did not specify where the company is located.</p> <p>Symantec traces Stonefly’s activity back to distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks in July 2009 against South Korean, U.S. government, and financial websites. The shift to cyber-espionage in 2019 was firm, the company said, and the February incident has clear hallmarks of Stonefly activity.</p> <p>“While Stonefly’s tools and tactics continue to evolve, there are some common threads between this recent activity and previous attacks, such as its ongoing development of the Preft backdoor and heavy reliance on open-source tools,” Symantec said.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Who tried to hack Hawaii undersea cable?
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/who-tried-to-hack-hawaiis-undersea-cable/
GIST	<p>Was a recently-thwarted cyberattack on a Hawaii undersea cable the work of financially-motivated cybercriminals, government-linked hackers, or someone else? Hawaii officials are working with federal agents to determine exactly that, according to Frank Pace, the administrator of the Hawaii Office of Homeland Security.</p>

“That’s what we’re trying to figure out,” he said, adding even their intention is unclear. “Whether it was just a known cybercriminal group that wanted to compromise individuals or executives within the organization, or to install various forms of ransomware to hold their systems hostage.”

The threat actors allegedly [hacked a private company](#) on the mainland, which had access to the underwater cable’s servers, among other credentials.

Pace spoke with Dina Temple-Raston and Sean Powers of the Click Here podcast about the thwarted hack. The interview has been edited for length and clarity, and an excerpt is available in [this week’s episode of the Click Here podcast](#).

Click Here: This might sound odd to ask, but what does an undersea cable actually look like?

Frank Pace: So, an undersea cable really isn’t that large, and it stretches over thousands of miles. The cables have several strands and the best way that I could describe it is as if you were to look at one of the larger power cables that you see over your home. Usually within those, you might notice there’s actually several other cables inside of it. It’s wrapped around in a very strong steel coding. It looks like that.

CH: How much data flows through these cables?

FP: They’re capable of transmitting about 180,000 miles per second, at 400 gigabytes of data per second. A predominant amount of our communication goes through these cables. There’s more reliance on them with the increase of cloud computing, streaming, and both private and governmental operations being conducted on the cables.

CH: If I was a threat actor, why would the cables be a favored target?

FP: When we look at the expanding attack surface that these cables provide running throughout the world and reaching into most every government and home, they provide an opportunity for, among other things, economic espionage. There’s also an understanding of critical infrastructure systems that are connected to those cables.

CH: If this attack had been successful, what would have happened?

FP: From a cyber perspective, we really don’t know because at the end of the day, if it’s related to economic espionage, or trying to gain information related to Department of Defense assets, that we might not notice an impact because they don’t want us to see it.

[Was it] just a known cybercriminal group that wanted to compromise individuals or executives within the organization, or did they want to install various forms of ransomware to hold their systems hostage, that’s what we’re trying to figure out. There’s a variety of things that could have occurred, we just don’t know yet.

CH: When you heard about this attempted breach, what went through your mind?

FP: What went through my mind were what are the impacts? What do we know? What is it that we need to have further awareness of so that we could further prepare not only leaders within the state of Hawaii, but also other businesses or entities that need to better prepare themselves if we knew how that compromise occurred.

CH: Have you ever seen a similar attempt before this that got your hackles up about the cable?

FP: Here in the state, no. We have not seen something to the extent where it has been focused on an entity that is involved with the cables. We have seen more recently entities or organizations within city and county governments that have been impacted by different forms of malware or ransomware. Those incidents were not the intended or focused targets, but as a result of vulnerabilities within their systems, they were compromised. I think we’re likely to see more of that in the near future.

CH: Was there any concern that the timing of this or the discovery of this had anything to do with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine?

FP: I would guess that they’re still looking into that. However, from the perspective of our office, we all need to be aware of the geopolitical issues that are occurring throughout the world, but specifically related

	to Ukraine. CISA director Jen Easterly spoke to this not long ago that clearly what is occurring in Ukraine matters because there is the strong likelihood that any retaliation based on support for Ukrainians could be in the form of a cyberattack, or at least a disruption.
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HEADLINE	04/28 New malware loader 'BumbleBee'
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/cybercriminals-using-new-malware-loader.html
GIST	<p>Cybercriminal actors previously observed delivering BazaLoader and IcedID as part of their malware campaigns are said to have transitioned to a new loader called Bumblebee that's under active development.</p> <p>"Based on the timing of its appearance in the threat landscape and use by multiple cybercriminal groups, it is likely Bumblebee is, if not a direct replacement for BazaLoader, then a new, multifunctional tool used by actors that historically favored other malware," enterprise security firm Proofpoint said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>Campaigns distributing the new highly sophisticated loader are said to have commenced in March 2022, while sharing overlaps with malicious activity leading to the deployment of Conti and Diavol ransomware, raising the possibility that the loader could act as a precursor for ransomware attacks.</p> <p>"Threat actors using Bumblebee are associated with malware payloads that have been linked to follow-on ransomware campaigns," the researchers said.</p> <p>Besides featuring anti-virtualization checks, Bumblebee is written in C++ and is engineered to act as a downloader for retrieving and executing next-stage payloads, including Cobalt Strike, Sliver, Meterpreter, and shellcode.</p> <p>Interestingly, the increased detection of the malware loader in the threat landscape corresponds to the disappearance of BazaLoader deployments since February 2022, another popular loader developed by the makers of the now-defunct TrickBot gang, which has since been absorbed into Conti.</p> <p>Attack chains distributing Bumblebee have taken the form of DocuSign-branded email phishing lures incorporating fraudulent links or HTML attachments, leading potential victims to a compressed ISO file hosted on Microsoft OneDrive.</p> <p>What's more, the embedded URL in the HTML attachment makes use of a traffic direction system (TDS) dubbed Prometheus — which is available for sale on underground platforms for \$250 a month — to redirect the URLs to the archive files based on the time zone and cookies of the victims.</p> <p>The ZIP files, in turn, include .LNK and .DAT files, with the Windows shortcut file executing the latter containing the Bumblebee downloader, before using it to deliver BazaLoader and IcedID malware.</p> <p>A second campaign in April 2022 involved a thread-hijacking scheme in which legitimate invoice-themed emails were taken over to send zipped ISO files, which were then used to execute a DLL file to activate the loader.</p> <p>Also observed is the abuse of the contact form present on the target's website to send a message claiming copyright violations of images, pointing the victim to a Google Cloud Storage link that results in the download of a compressed ISO file, thereby continuing the aforementioned infection sequence.</p> <p>The transition from BazarLoader to Bumblebee is further evidence that these threat actors — likely initial access brokers who infiltrate targets and then sell that access to others — are receiving the malware from a common source, while also signaling a departure after the Conti group's attack toolkit became public knowledge around the same time.</p>

	<p>The development also overlaps with Conti taking over the infamous TrickBot botnet and shutting it down to focus on the development of BazarLoader and Anchor malware. It's not immediately clear if the leaks prompted the gang to abandon BazaLoader in favor of Bumblebee.</p> <p>"The introduction of the Bumblebee loader to the crimeware threat landscape and its apparent replacement for BazarLoader demonstrates the flexibility threat actors have to quickly shift TTPs and adopt new malware," Sherrod DeGrippe, vice president of threat research and detection at Proofpoint, said.</p> <p>"Additionally, the malware is quite sophisticated, and demonstrates being in ongoing, active development introducing new methods of evading detection," DeGrippe added.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia govt. impersonators target telcos
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/russian-govt-impersonators-target-telcos-in-phishing-attacks/
GIST	<p>A previously unknown and financially motivated hacking group is impersonating a Russian agency in a phishing campaign targeting entities in Eastern European countries.</p> <p>The phishing emails pretend to come from the Russian Government's Federal Bailiffs Service and are written in the Russian language, with the recipients being telecommunication service providers and industrial firms in Lithuania, Estonia, and Russia.</p> <p>The ultimate goal of the malicious emails is to drop a copy of the DarkWatchman malware onto the victim's computers, a lightweight, stealthy JavaScript RAT (remote access tool) with a C# keylogger.</p> <p>DarkWatchman has been linked to Russian threat actors before, focusing primarily on targeting organizations in their own country.</p> <p>In this campaign, discovered by IBM's X-Force team, the threat group is identified as Hive0117, and they appear to take advantage of the turbulence in the region, which is currently facing a variety of malicious cyber activities.</p> <p>Campaign details</p> <p>In many of the cases seen by X-Force, the phishing emails targeted the owners of companies or at least high-ranking employees.</p> <p>The sender's address imitates an authentic one from the Russian Ministry of Justice, for example, "mail@r77[.]fssprus[.]ru", and the email body also features the real emblem.</p> <p>The subject of the emails is typically something compelling that will convince the recipient to open the attachment, which is a ZIP archive named 'Исполнительный лист XXXXXXX-22' or 'Счет 63711-21 от 30.12.2021.zip'.</p> <p>"The contents of the emails feature identical Russian-language text detailing several articles related to enforcement procedures associated with the Kuntsevsky District Court of Moscow, upheld by the 'Bailiff of the Interdistrict Department of Bailiffs for the Execution of Decisions of the Tax Authorities'," explains IBM in their report.</p> <p>The attached ZIP file attachments contain executables that drop DarkWatchman on the compromised machine, along with a copy of the encrypted keylogger.</p> <p>In some cases, the threat actors used loader files that fetched two obfuscated payloads from an online resource (domtut[.]site fun online), a JavaScript file that is the backdoor, and a PowerShell block that executes a keylogger.</p>

	<p>X-Force's analysis also reveals that the DarkWatchman strain used by Hive0117 employs a domain generation algorithm (DGA) to generate C2 domains, making its infrastructure mapping and take-down harder.</p> <p>Parallel Activity</p> <p>IBM's analysts believe Hive0117 isn't affiliated with Russian APTs or part of a state-sponsored cluster that carries out cyber-espionage and cyber-warfare operations.</p> <p>"While the target list of the phishing campaign attributed to Hive0117 has regional associations with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the activity predates the invasion, indicating they're separate from any politically charged associations that have spurred recent waves of criminal activity," explains IBM. The threat group appears to be motivated by financial profit, and they're likely targeting entities with a large user base to access their client pool indirectly.</p> <p>The use of DarkWatchman, a file-less malware, is categorizing Hive0117 as a semi-sophisticated actor, still capable of causing significant damage to organizations in Eastern Europe.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Black Basta ransomware springs into action
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-black-basta-ransomware-springs-into-action-with-a-dozen-breaches/
GIST	<p>A new ransomware gang known as Black Basta has quickly catapulted into operation this month, breaching at least twelve companies in just a few weeks.</p> <p>The first known Black Basta attacks occurred in the second week of April, as the operation quickly began attacking companies worldwide.</p> <p>While ransom demands likely vary between victims, BleepingComputer is aware of one victim who received over a \$2 million demand from the Black Basta gang to decrypt files and not leak data.</p> <p>Not much else is known about the new ransomware gang as they have not begun marketing their operation or recruiting affiliates on hacking forums.</p> <p>However, due to their ability to quickly amass new victims and the style of their negotiations, this is likely not a new operation but rather a rebrand of a previous top-tier ransomware gang that brought along their affiliates.</p> <p>Steals data before encrypting</p> <p>Like other enterprise-targeting ransomware operations, Black Basta will steal corporate data and documents before encrypting a company's devices.</p> <p>This stolen data is then used in double-extortion attacks, where the threat actors demand a ransom to receive a decryptor and prevent the publishing of the victim's stolen data.</p> <p>The data extortion part of these attacks is conducted on the 'Black Basta Blog' or 'Basta News' Tor site, which contains a list of all victims who have not paid a ransom. Black Basta will slowly leak data for each victim to try and pressure them into paying a ransom.</p> <p>The Black Basta data leak site currently contains data leak pages for ten companies they breached. However, BleepingComputer knows of other victims not currently listed on the data leak site.</p> <p>Their most recent listed victim is Deutsche Windtechnik, who suffered a cyberattack on April 11th but had not disclosed it was a ransomware attack.</p>

Yesterday, the data leak site also began leaking the data for the American Dental Association, which suffered an attack on April 22nd, but that page has since been removed. The removal of their page indicates that the company is negotiating with the threat actors.

Ransomware expert Michael Gillespie, who analyzed Black Basta's encryption process, told BleepingComputer that it utilizes the ChaCha20 algorithm to encrypt files. The ChaCha20 encryption key is then encrypted with a public RSA-4096 key included in the executable.

While encrypting files, the ransomware will append the .basta extension to the encrypted file's name. So, for example, test.jpg would be encrypted and renamed to test.jpg.basta.

To display the custom icon associated with the .basta extension, the ransomware will create a custom extension in the Windows Registry and associate the icon with a randomly named ICO file in the %Temp% folder. This custom icon is very similar to one used by the icy.tools app.

In each folder on the encrypted device, the ransomware will create a readme.txt file that contains information about the attack and a link and unique ID required to log in to their negotiation chat session.

The Tor negotiation site is titled 'Chat Black Basta' and only includes a login screen and a web chat that can be used to negotiate with the threat actors.

The threat actors use this screen to issue a welcome message that contains a ransom demand, a threat that data will be leaked if payment is not made in seven days, and the promise of a security report after a ransom is paid.

Unfortunately, Gillespie says that the encryption algorithm is secure and that there is no way to recover files for free.

A likely rebrand

Based on how quickly Black Basta amassed victims and the style of their negotiations, this is very likely a rebrand of an experienced operation.

One theory discussed between security researcher MalwareHunterTeam and this author is that Black Basta is possibly an upcoming rebrand of the Conti ransomware operation.

Conti has been under heavy scrutiny over the past two months after a Ukrainian researcher leaked a treasure trove of private conversations and the ransomware's source code.

Due to this, it has been speculated that Conti would rebrand their operation to evade law enforcement and start over under a different name.

While the Black Basta encryptor is very different from Conti's, MalwareHunterTeam believes that there are numerous similarities in their negotiation style and website design.

Furthermore, Black Basta released the data for a brand new victim after a screenshot of the negotiation was leaked.

This "punishment" is the same that Conti introduced to stem the tide of negotiations being leaked on Twitter.

While these connections are tenuous, the Black Basta gang needs to be closely monitored as they have only just begun their operation.

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SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/psa-onyx-ransomware-destroys-large-files-instead-of-encrypting-them/
GIST	<p>A new Onyx ransomware operation is destroying large files instead of encrypting them, preventing those files from being decrypted even if a ransom is paid.</p> <p>Last week, security researcher MalwareHunterTeam discovered that a new ransomware operation had launched called Onyx.</p> <p>Like most of today's ransomware operations, Onyx threat actors steal data from a network before encrypting devices. This data is then used in double-extortion schemes where they threaten to publicly release the data if a ransom is not paid.</p> <p>The ransomware gang has been reasonably successful so far, with six victims listed on their data leak page.</p> <p>However, the technical functionality of the ransomware was not known until today, when MalwareHunterTeam found a sample of the encryptor.</p> <p>What was found is concerning, as the ransomware overwrites large files with random junk data rather than encrypting them.</p> <p>As this is just randomly created data and not encrypted, there is no way to decrypt files larger than 200MB in size.</p> <p>Even if a victim pays, the decryptor can recover only the smaller encrypted files.</p> <p>Based on the source code, the destructive nature of the encryption routine is intentional rather than a bug. Therefore, it's advised that victims avoid paying the ransom.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Tenn. university suffers ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/austin-peay-state-university-resumes-after-ransomware-cyber-attack/
GIST	<p>Austin Peay State University (APSU) confirmed yesterday that it had been a victim of a ransomware attack.</p> <p>The university, located in Clarksville, Tennessee advised students, staff, and faculty to disconnect their computers and devices from the university network immediately as a precaution.</p> <p>Subsequent tweets by APSU confirm that the attack is being contained and all employees are expected to report as usual.</p> <p>'Ransomeware', 'ransom ware', <i>ran somewhere</i> On Wednesday, April 27th, Austin Peay State University (APSU), via its official Twitter account, confirmed that it had been hit by a cyberattack.</p> <p>Established in 1927, APSU is a public American university based in Clarksville, Tennessee, whose notable alumni have included reality TV fitness trainer Bob Harper, former NFL player Bonnie Sloan, and the current Secretary of the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet, the Honorable Mary C. Noble.</p> <p>"We are under a Ransomeware [sic] attack. If your computer is connected to the APSU network, please disconnect IMMEDIATELY," tweeted the university yesterday.</p>

Within a few hours of posting these tweets, APSU reassured that the cyber attack was in the process of being contained and that D2L, the university's Learning Management System (LMS) was back up online at elearn.apsu.edu.

Further, the school confirms being open today, April 28th, and advises, "all employees report as normal," and to check their APSU email inbox for further instructions.

Despite that, some users are continuing to report issues with the D2L portal.

While some [acknowledged](#) university's transparency in promptly disclosing the cyber attack, not everyone seems pleased.

"PSA: this is not how you alert your faculty and students of a breach," [said](#) IT Consultant Adam Parsons.

"I hope Twitter isn't the only way you are notifying students and faculty," [tweeted](#) another user Dan King.

Some were also skeptical of the institution's approach to incident response [[1](#), [2](#)].

However, during an active ransomware attack, email and IT systems are typically shut down—often voluntarily by sysadmins attempting to control the damage from the cyber attack.

The varied spelling of 'ransomware' used by the school—'ransomware' and 'ransom ware,' within tweets and web pages, also drew a fair amount of ridicule [[1](#), [2](#)].

Higher education is another one of the sectors that continue to be targeted by ransomware groups.

Previously, prominent institutions including [Stanford Medicine](#), [University of California](#), [Howard](#), and UK-based [Sunderland](#), have all been victims of ransomware attacks with some attacks leading to data theft, system outages, and cancellation of classes.

The whereabouts of the threat actors that hit APSU, and the details of the ransom demand are yet to be known.

BleepingComputer has reached out to APSU's officials with specific questions and we are awaiting their response.

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HEADLINE	04/27 China-backed hackers eye Russia officials
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chinese-state-backed-hackers-now-target-russian-state-officers/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Security researchers analyzing a phishing campaign targeting Russian officials found evidence that points to the China-based threat actor tracked as Mustang Panda (also known as HoneyMyte and Bronze President).</p> <p>The threat group was previously seen orchestrating intelligence collection campaigns against European targets, employing phishing lures inspired by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Russia has always remained in the threat group's crosshair, albeit at a limited scale, as the two countries generally maintain good geopolitical relationships.</p> <p>In a report today, cybersecurity company Secureworks presents new evidence of such targeting, which may not be as limited as previously thought.</p> <p>Phishing Russian officials</p>

The threat actors employ phishing lures that rely on English documents supposedly released by the European Union, containing sanction details against Belarus.

Although the files sent are Windows executables (.exe), they are made to appear as PDFs and are named after a Russian city close to the border with China, Blagoveshchensk.

This suggests that the targets of this campaign are Russian personnel in the region, which further supports the theory that China may be shifting to new intelligence gathering objectives.

Upon launching the executable, a host of additional files are fetched, including the previously mentioned decoy EU document, a malicious DLL loader, an encrypted PlugX variant, and a digitally signed .EXE file.

Loading PlugX

The DLL loader performs DLL search order hijacking using a legitimate signed file (from UK-based Global Graphics Software Ltd) that is vulnerable to this trick. The method is typical to Mustang Panda, used to execute the PlugX malware payload.

This approach allows threat actors to load their malicious DocConvDll.dll DLL loader in a stealthy manner that does not trigger security solutions on the system.

The DLL loader exports eight functions but only one of them comes with relevant instructions. It appears that this is to evade automatic analysis.

The 'createSystemFontsUsingEDL' function loads, decrypts, and executes the FontLog.dat file, which is the PlugX payload.

Although the PlugX sample analyzed by Secureworks was corrupted, its code points to DLL side-loading and malware execution from within a newly created directory, at "C:\ProgramData\Fuji Xerox\Fonts\".

The staging server used in this campaign is the same that supported the [EU diplomats campaign](#), also hosting the zyber-i[.]com domain that was implicated in that operation.

It is worth noting that PlugX has been used by so many adversaries that attribution based on this malware is impossible.

However, Secureworks connected this campaign to Bronze President/Mustang Panda based on the infrastructure used, which has been attributed to this particular actor in the past.

Outlook

Although Mustang Panda continues deploying the same malware strains and loader tools, and even though parts of its infrastructure overlap with past campaigns, the threat actor remains relatively stealthy and potent.

Its focus appears to be refreshing the spear-phishing lures and crafting specialized email messages for very narrow targeting operations, so the intelligence collection is constantly shifting.

For now, using the provided indicators of compromise for email and network defense would render most of the threat actor's infection attempts ineffective.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Ransomware demands are growing
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/ransomware-demands-are-growing-but-life-is-getting-tougher-for-malware-gangs/?&web_view=true

GIST

Victims of ransomware attacks are paying higher ransoms than ever before, but there are signs that organisations are starting to take heed of cybersecurity advice, making them more resilient to cyber criminals.

According to analysis by [cybersecurity researchers at Sophos](#), the average ransom payment made by victims to choose to pay cyber criminals for a decryption key to restore their files and servers following a successful [ransomware attack](#) has increased to \$812,260 – an almost five-fold increase compared with the 2020 average of \$170,000.

And the proportion of victims who pay ransoms of over \$1 million has also risen substantially, up from 4% of ransom payments in 2020 to 11% in 2021 – meaning one in ten successful ransomware attacks is providing cyber criminals with a [million-dollar payday](#).

According to analysis by Sophos, just under half of ransomware victims pay the ransom, perceiving it to be the quickest way to restore the network – even though decryption keys provided by cyber criminals can't be trusted and paying a ransom might just show that the victim [is an easy target who could be extorted again](#).

Ransomware attacks continue to be successful because cyber criminals can still [exploit common cybersecurity vulnerabilities](#) to enter networks and carry out campaigns. But while ransomware is still a major cybersecurity issue, there are signs that the situation could be about to get better.

"I'm a little optimistic for the first time in years about ransomware – I think we might be at the peak of our worst right now and I'm hoping we start to turn a corner," Chester Wisniewski, principal research scientist at Sophos, told ZDNet, citing how government bodies like the US [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#) (CISA) and the UK [National Cyber Security Centre](#) (NCSC) have stepped in in "a meaningful way" to provide accessible and useful advice on how to improve cybersecurity.

"The advice they're giving and the things they're doing are actually helping – I don't think enough organisations are listening to them yet, but at least the resources are accessible, approachable and usable, so it's a good start," he said

In addition to this, [cyber-insurance providers](#) are demanding better security preparations from companies before issuing policies. Wisniewski also said the US sanctions against Russia following its invasion of Ukraine have had an impact on American businesses that do not want to pay ransoms to cyber criminals, who are often working out of that region.

"We're seeing it being a really serious motivator for American companies and insurance companies to not pay ransoms," he said.

But while there are some encouraging signs, it's unlikely ransomware is going away any time soon.

The reason ransomware is so lucrative for cyber criminals is because there are victims who pay the ransoms. And if there are organisations out there who are vulnerable to cyberattacks and are still willing to pay six-figure ransom demands, there's always going to be ransomware groups trying to exploit this fact.

"I don't think you're ever going to deter the hardcore ransomware groups because there's too much money to be made when they're getting multi-million dollar hits," said Wisniewski.

"Crooks aren't going to walk away from that, even if it's a one in twenty chance – it's still a million dollars," he added.

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HEADLINE 04/26 NSA goes beyond information-sharing

SOURCE	https://www.businessinsider.in/international/news/the-nsa-is-going-beyond-information-sharing-to-defend-us-companies-against-growing-threats-from-russia-and-china/articleshow/91102741.cms?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Our adversaries are constantly probing the computer networks of US critical infrastructure operators, especially those in the defense industrial base (DIB).</p> <p>More than ever before, US DIB companies handle sensitive information that makes them targets for adversary countries — particularly Russian intelligence agencies and other proxies of Moscow, but also the government of the People's Republic of China — that want to steal our secrets or degrade our defenses at any time, but especially during a time of geopolitical conflict. Our previous efforts are no longer enough.</p> <p>The National Security Agency is dedicated to protecting these companies, which research, produce and maintain systems critical to our nation's defense. I run an organization within NSA called the Cybersecurity Collaboration Center. Our mission is to combat cybersecurity threats through close partnerships with companies from the defense industry, and select service.</p> <p>With all these partners working side-by-side, we develop a comprehensive threat picture and work towards stopping aggressive attempts by foreign adversaries to gain access to critical US networks, specifically the DIB.</p> <p>Cybersecurity efforts across the federal government rely on each agency bringing different authorities and capabilities to the fight. NSA has access to a wide array of data sources, but we also have access to unique foreign intelligence and insights from defending global Department of Defense networks that helps reveal our adversaries' capabilities and intentions, which informs our efforts to stop them.</p> <p>Alongside our partners across the federal government — like DHS's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the FBI, and the Defense Cyber Crime Center — NSA dives into intelligence to develop deep insights into ways our adversaries are trying to exploit US networks. When we find evidence of what they are trying, we work with the cybersecurity community to close those vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Public-private partnerships are nothing new in cybersecurity — and they remain crucial to our success — but the way we work with the private sector has evolved substantially in recent years: The threat has evolved, and many large companies now have world-class cybersecurity experts dedicated to defending their data and networks.</p> <p>This means that we are going beyond a vision of partnerships for "information sharing," which is too transactional. In order to prevent threats, we need to have open conversations in real-time. That is why NSA built the new Cybersecurity Collaboration Center outside the NSA fence line, where we can operate in an unclassified space.</p> <p>To facilitate these conversations, we needed to be able to operate alongside our partners. As part of this effort, we have transformed our defensive work from sharing information to full-scale collaboration that supports defenders across the national security ecosystem.</p> <p>In many cases, NSA analysts and our partners in industry are looking at the same problem from a different point of view. We have learned that by coming together on shared priorities, we can share our expertise with one another and understand the full picture. It is not just sharing — it's operational collaboration. This is a decisive advantage when it comes to countering malicious cyber activity.</p> <p>For collaboration to be effective, it must be a two-way street. It takes place at every level from the operations center to the boardroom, and it is always informed by our collective understanding of the threats we face. That collaboration can involve two-way sharing of technical data during an ongoing cyber incident.</p> <p>It can involve bringing some of the world's foremost experts in cybersecurity together to identify how different data sources can identify, track, and thwart malicious cyber actors. It can even involve detailed</p>

conversations with senior executives about how we can ensure that [the next generation of technology is secure by design](#).

This new way of doing business has required a major culture shift within NSA. The old joke in Washington was that the NSA was so secretive that our initials stood for "No Such Agency."

If we had information to share with a company, we could bring their representatives into Fort Meade to share it with them — as long as the right people in the company had high enough security clearances. With our adversaries actively pursuing the degradation and exploitation of commercial networks, that model is no longer effective.

At the Cybersecurity Collaboration Center, we are driving that culture change within NSA as part of the evolution of the broader cybersecurity community. Our analysts work to get threat information down to the lowest classification level possible so we can share it with the companies we work with as quickly as possible. Our goal is for our information to be actionable, unique, and timely.

We understand the need to be where our partners are, communicating over commercial off-the-shelf collaboration tools, remotely and in real-time. That means that a lot of our work takes places on unclassified platforms and in unclassified spaces.

It also means that our team has the ability to work from home when COVID cases are high, in inclement weather, or when a crisis hits over a holiday weekend, [a preferred tactic of malicious actors](#). These changes help us protect the Defense Industrial Base 24/7.

I am incredibly proud of the work we have done and the new things we are working on. We actively collaborate with more than 100 companies, but we still have a long way to go.

In the next year, in addition to expanding our partnerships, we are expanding support to the Defense Industrial Base with low-cost cybersecurity products that help companies — especially small- and medium-sized enterprises that may not have well-resourced security programs — protect against many of the most common ways that malware and ransomware get into networks, like our new [Protective Domain Name Service](#) powered by NSA cyber threat intelligence.

As Gen. Paul M. Nakasone, NSA's director, likes to point out, "cybersecurity is national security," and we are always finding new ways to break down barriers and play our part. Together, we avoid bottlenecks and empower collective defense. We need to continue to grow and evolve: The adversary won't stop, and neither can we.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia cyberattacks support military strikes
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/27/world/ukraine-russia-war-news#russia-is-using-cyberattacks-in-ukraine-to-support-military-strikes-a-report-found
GIST	<p>For weeks after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, American officials wondered about the weapon that seemed to be missing: Russia's mighty cyberarsenal, which most experts expected would be used in the opening hours of an invasion to bring down Ukraine's power grid, fry its cellphone system and cut off President Volodymyr Zelensky from the world.</p> <p>None of that happened. But in a new study released Wednesday by Microsoft, it is now clear that Russia used its A-team of hackers to conduct hundreds of far more subtle attacks, many timed to coincide with incoming missile or ground attacks. And it turned out that, just as in the ground war, the Russians were less skillful, and the Ukrainians were better defenders, than most experts expected.</p> <p>"They brought destructive efforts, they brought espionage efforts, they brought all their best actors to focus on this," said Tom Burt, who oversees Microsoft's investigations into the biggest and most complex cyberattacks that are visible through its global networks. But he also noted that while "they had some</p>

success,” the Russians were met with a robust defense from the Ukrainians that blocked some of the online attacks.

[The report](#) adds considerable subtlety to an understanding of the early days of the war, when the shelling and troop movements were obvious, but the cyberoperations were less visible — and more difficult to blame, at least right away, on Russia’s major intelligence agencies.

But it is now becoming clear that Russia used hacking campaigns to support its ground campaign in Ukraine, pairing malware with missiles in several attacks, including on TV stations and government agencies, according to Microsoft’s research. The report demonstrates Russia’s persistent use of cyberweapons, upending early analysis that suggested they did not play a prominent role in the conflict.

“It’s been a relentless cyberwar that has paralleled, and in some cases directly supported, the kinetic war,” Mr. Burt said. Hackers affiliated with Russia were carrying out cyberattacks “on a daily, 24/7 basis since hours before the physical invasion began,” he added.

Microsoft could not determine whether Russia’s hackers and its troops had merely been given similar targets to pursue or had actively coordinated their efforts. But Russian cyberattacks often struck within days — and sometimes within hours — of on-the-ground activity.

At least six Russian nation-state hacking groups have launched more than 237 operations against Ukrainian businesses and government agencies, Microsoft said in its report. The attacks were often intended to destroy computer systems, but some also aimed to gather intelligence or spread misinformation.

Although Russia routinely relied on malware, espionage and disinformation to further its agenda in Ukraine, it appeared that Moscow was trying to limit its hacking campaigns to stay within Ukraine’s borders, Microsoft said, perhaps in an attempt to avoid drawing NATO countries into the conflict.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia aim in Ukraine: digital dossiers
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/a-chilling-russian-cyber-aim-in-ukraine-digital-dossiers/
GIST	<p>BOSTON (AP) — Russia’s relentless digital assaults on Ukraine may have caused less damage than many anticipated. But most of its hacking is focused on a different goal that gets less attention but has chilling potential consequences: data collection.</p> <p>Ukrainian agencies breached on the eve of the Feb. 24 invasion include the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which oversees the police, national guard and border patrol. A month earlier, a national database of automobile insurance policies was raided during a diversionary cyberattack that defaced Ukrainian websites.</p> <p>The hacks, paired with prewar data theft, likely armed Russia with extensive details on much of Ukraine’s population, cybersecurity and military intelligence analysts say. It’s information Russia can use to identify and locate Ukrainians most likely to resist an occupation, and potentially target them for internment or worse.</p> <p>“Fantastically useful information if you’re planning an occupation,” Jack Watling, a military analyst at the U.K. think tank Royal United Services Institute, said of the auto insurance data, “knowing exactly which car everyone drives and where they live and all that.”</p> <p>As the digital age evolves, information dominance is increasingly wielded for social control, as China has shown in its repression of the Uyghur minority. It was no surprise to Ukrainian officials that a prewar priority for Russia would be compiling information on the citizenry.</p> <p>“The idea was to kill or imprison these people at the early stages of occupation,” Victor Zhora, a senior Ukrainian cyber defense official, alleged.</p>

Aggressive data collection accelerated just ahead of the invasion, with hackers serving Russia's military increasingly targeting individual Ukrainians, according to Zhora's agency, the State Service for Special Communications and Information Protection.

Serhii Demediuk, deputy secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, said via email that personal data continues to be a priority for Russian hackers as they attempt more government network breaches: "Cyberwarfare is really in the hot phase nowadays."

There is little doubt political targeting is a goal. Ukraine says Russian forces have killed and kidnapped local leaders where they grab territory.

Demediuk was stingy with specifics but said Russian cyberattacks in mid-January and as the invasion commenced sought primarily to "destroy the information systems of government agencies and critical infrastructure" and included data theft.

The Ukrainian government says the Jan. 14 auto insurance hack resulted in the pilfering of up to 80% of Ukrainian policies registered with the Motor Transport Bureau.

Demediuk acknowledged that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was among government agencies breached Feb. 23. He said data was stolen but would not say from which agencies, only that it "has not led to significant consequences, especially when it comes to data on servicemen or volunteers." Security researchers from ESET and other cybersecurity firms that work with Ukraine said the networks were compromised months earlier, allowing ample time for stealthy theft.

The data collection by hacking is a work long in progress.

A unit of Russia's FSB intelligence agency that researchers have dubbed Armageddon has been doing it for years out of Crimea, which Russia seized in 2014. Ukraine says it sought to infect more than 1,500 Ukrainian government computer systems.

Since October it has tried to breach and maintain access to government, military, judiciary and law enforcement agencies as well as nonprofits, with a primary goal of "exfiltrating sensitive information," Microsoft said in a Feb. 4 blog post. That included unnamed organizations "critical to emergency response and ensuring the security of Ukrainian territory," plus humanitarian aid distribution.

Post-invasion, hackers have targeted European organizations that aid Ukrainian refugees, according to Zhora and the cybersecurity firm Proofpoint. Authorities have not specified which organizations or what may have been stolen.

Yet another attack, on April 1, crippled Ukraine's National Call Center, which runs a hotline for complaints and inquiries on a wide array of matters: corruption, domestic abuse, people displaced by the invasion, war veteran benefits. Used by hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, it issues COVID-19 vaccine certificates and collects callers' personal data including emails, addresses and phone numbers.

Adam Meyers, senior vice president of intelligence at the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike, believes the attack may, like many others, have a greater psychological than intelligence-gathering impact — aiming to degrade Ukrainians' trust in their institutions.

"Make them scared that when the Russians take over, if they don't cooperate, the Russians are going to know who they are, where they are and come after them," Meyers said.

The attack knocked the center offline for at least three days, center director Marianna Vilshinska said: "We couldn't work. Neither phones nor chatbots worked. They broke down all the system."

Hackers calling themselves the Cyber Army of Russia claimed to steal personal data on 7 million people in the attack. However, Vilshinska denied they breached the database with users' personal information, while confirming that a contact list the hackers posted online of more than 300 center employees was genuine.

Spear-phishing attacks in recent weeks have focused on military, national and local officials, aimed at stealing credentials to open government data troves. Such activity relies heavily on Ukraine's cellular networks, which Meyers of CrowdStrike said have been far too rich in intelligence for Russia to want to shut down.

On March 31, Ukraine's SBU intelligence agency said it had seized a "bot farm" in the eastern region of Dnipropetrovsk that was controlled remotely from Russia and sent text messages to 5,000 Ukrainian soldiers, police and SBU members urging them to surrender or sabotage their units. Agency spokesman Artem Dekhtiarenko said authorities were investigating how the phone numbers were obtained.

Gene Yoo, CEO of the cybersecurity firm ReSecurity, said it likely was not difficult: Subscriber databases of major Ukrainian wireless companies have been available for sale by cybercriminals on the dark web for some time — as they are for many countries.

If Russia is successful at taking control of more of eastern Ukraine, stolen personal data will be an asset. Russian occupiers have already collected passport information, a top Ukrainian presidential adviser tweeted recently, that could help organize separatist referendums.

Ukraine, for its part, appears to have done significant data collection — quietly assisted by the U.S., the U.K., and other partners — targeting Russian soldiers, spies and police, including rich geolocation data.

Demediuk, the top security official, said the country knows "exactly where and when a particular serviceman crossed the border with Ukraine, in which occupied settlement he stopped, in which building he spent the night, stole and committed crimes on our land."

"We know their cell phone numbers, the names of their parents, wives, children, their home addresses," who their neighbors are, where they went to school and the names of their teachers, he said.

Analysts caution that some claims about data collection from both sides of the conflict may be exaggerated.

But in recordings posted online by Ukrainian Digital Transformation Minister Mikhailo Fedorov, callers are heard phoning the far-flung wives of Russian soldiers and posing as Russian state security officials to say parcels shipped to them from Belarus were looted from Ukrainian homes.

In one, a nervous-sounding woman acknowledges receiving what she calls souvenirs — a woman's bag, a keychain.

The caller tells her she shares criminal liability, that her husband "killed people in Ukraine and stole their stuff."

She hangs up.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Check cell service amid 3G shutdowns
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article260786242.html
GIST	<p>Whatcom County 911 is warning residents who may no longer be able to reach emergency phone operators on their cell phones.</p> <p>Mobile carriers such as Verizon, TMobile, AT&T and Sprint are in the process of shutting down their 3G networks in order to implement more advanced services such as 5G. As a result, many cell phones will be unable to make or receive calls and texts, including calls to 911, the FCC stated in a consumer guide.</p>

WHAT PHONES WILL BE AFFECTED?

Many older cell phones such as 3G mobile phones and some older 4G mobile phones that do not support Voice over LTE (VoLTE or HD Voice) will be affected. Phones that are more than a few years old may need to be replaced with newer devices to avoid losing service, the guide states.

WHAT MOBILE CARRIERS ARE RETIRING 3G?

AT&T retired all 3G services in February 2022, the first carrier to complete the retirement. Verizon is will finish shutting down its 3G service on December 31, 2022.

T-Mobile is in control of various shutdowns for both its own services as well as Sprint's.

Sprint's 3G network was shut down on March 31, 2022, as well as retiring Sprint's 4G LTE networks by June 30, 2022.

T-Mobile's own 3G network will be retired on July 1, and has not announced a date of termination for its 2G services the carrier continues to offer. Other mobile carriers such as Straight Talk, Boost or Cricket may still be affected by these announcements, as many carriers use Verizon's, T-Mobile's or AT&T's networks to provide services.

Lifeline mobile service may also be affected.

The FCC recommends visiting your mobile provider's website for more information about how you may be affected.

ARE OTHER DEVICES AFFECTED?

Other devices such as smartwatches, tablets, home security systems, some medical devices, vehicle SOS services and other devices that use a 3G network will also be affected.

Other products that also use cellular data when unable to connect to WiFi will also be affected.

The FCC recommends contacting the product manufacturers to confirm how your devices will be impacted.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Russia being hacked unprecedented scale
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/russia-hacked-attacks/#intcid= wired-verso-hp-trending_e3bc8a6d-4fc7-4554-8574-607ff90ae966_popular4-1
GIST	<p>THE ORDERS ARE issued like clockwork. Every day, often at around 5 am local time, the Telegram channel housing Ukraine's unprecedented "IT Army" of hackers buzzes with a new list of targets. The volunteer group has been knocking Russian websites offline using wave after wave of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, which flood websites with traffic requests and make them inaccessible, since the war started.</p> <p>Russian online payment services, government departments, aviation companies, and food delivery firms have all been targeted by the IT Army as it aims to disrupt everyday life in Russia. "Russians have noticed regular hitches in the work of TV streaming services today," the government-backed operators of the Telegram channel posted following one claimed operation in mid-April.</p> <p>The IT Army's actions were just the start. Since Russia invaded Ukraine at the end of February, the country has faced an unprecedented barrage of hacking activity. Hacktivists, Ukrainian forces, and outsiders from all around the world who are taking part in the IT Army have targeted Russia and its business. DDoS attacks make up the bulk of the action, but researchers have spotted ransomware that's designed to target Russia and have been hunting for bugs in Russian systems, which could lead to more sophisticated attacks.</p>

The attacks against Russia stand in sharp contrast to recent history. Many cybercriminals and ransomware groups have links to Russia and don't target the nation. Now, it's being opened up. "Russia is typically considered one of those countries where cyberattacks come from and not go to," says Stefano De Blasi, a cyber-threat intelligence analyst at security firm Digital Shadows.

At the start of the war, DDoS was unrelenting. Record levels of DDoS attacks were recorded during the first three months of 2022, according to [analysis](#) from Russian cybersecurity company Kaspersky. Both Russia and Ukraine used DDoS to try to disrupt each other, but the efforts against Russia have been more innovative and prolonged.

Ukrainian tech companies [transformed the puzzle game 2048](#) into a simple way to launch DDoS attacks and have developed tools to allow anyone to join the action, irrespective of their technical knowledge. "The more we use attack automation tools, the stronger our attacks," reads a message sent to the IT Army Telegram channel on March 24. The channel's operators urge people to use VPNs to disguise their location and help avoid their targets' DDoS protections. Toward the end of April, the IT Army launched its own [website](#) that lists whether its targets are online or have been taken down and includes technical guides. (The IT Army did not respond to a request for comment.)

"We have made good strong hits, and a lot of websites don't work," says Dmytro Budorin, the CEO of Ukrainian cybersecurity startup Hacken. When the war started, Budorin and colleagues altered one of the firm's anti-DDoS tools, called disBalancer, so it could be used to launch DDoS attacks.

While Kaspersky's analysis says the number of DDoS around the world has returned to normal levels as the war has progressed, the attacks are lasting for longer—hours rather than minutes. The longest lasted for more than 177 hours, over a week, its researchers found. "Attacks continue regardless of their effectiveness," Kaspersky's analysis says. (On March 25, the US government added Kaspersky to its [list of national security threats](#); the company said it was ["disappointed" with the decision](#). Germany's cybersecurity agency also [warned against using Kaspersky's software](#) on March 15, although it didn't go as far as banning it. The company said it [believed the decision](#) was not made on a technical basis.)

Budorin says DDoS has been useful for helping Ukrainians contribute to the war effort in other ways than fighting and says that both sides have improved their attacks and defense. He admits DDoS may not have a huge impact on the war, though. "It doesn't have a lot of effects with respect to the end goal, and the end goal is to stop the war," Budorin says.

Since Russia began its full-scale invasion, the country's hackers have been caught [trying to disrupt power systems in Ukraine](#), deploying wiper malware, and launching [predictable disruption attacks against the Ukrainian government](#). However, Ukrainian officials now say they have seen a drop in activity. "The quality decreased recently as the enemy cannot prepare as much as they were able to prepare," Yuri Shchyhol, the head of Ukraine's cybersecurity agency, the State Service for Special Communication and Information Protection, said in a statement on April 20. "The enemy now mostly spends time on protecting themselves, because it turns out their systems are also vulnerable," Shchyhol said.

Budorin says that, beyond pivoting his company's technology to help launch DDoS attacks, it also created a bug bounty program for people to find and report security flaws in Russian systems. More than 3,000 reports have been made, he says. He claims this includes details of leaked databases, login information, and more severe instances where code can be run remotely on Russian systems. The company validates the vulnerabilities and passes them on to Ukrainian authorities, Budorin says. "You don't go through the main door," he says. "You go through the regional offices. There are so many bugs, so many open windows."

While cyberwarfare throughout the conflict may not have been as obvious or have the impact some predicted, many incidents may happen without publicity or outsider knowledge. "I think the most sophisticated operations going on right now are espionage—to find out what the opponent is trying to do, wants to do, and will do next," De Blasi says. "We may have to wait years before we discover anything about that."

Visibly, hacktivists and others attacking Russia have obtained and published [hundreds of gigabytes of Russian data and millions of emails](#)—the files may help unravel parts of the Russian state. But other attacks are happening, says Lotem Finkelstein, director of threat intelligence and research at Israeli cybersecurity company Check Point.

In early March, a new kind of ransomware was discovered. While most ransomware groups have links to Russia—something that has proved [costly for the Conti ransomware group](#) when it backed Putin—the new ransomware was designed to go after Russian organizations. “I, the creator of RU_Ransom, created this malware to harm Russia,” the code’s ransom note says, according to an [analysis](#) by security firm Trend Micro. The malware can spread as a worm and can wipe systems of data, although as of early March researchers had not yet spotted its use in the real world. “This is very rare to see the ransomware that targets Russia specifically,” Finkelstein says, adding that Check Point is working on new research that shows how Russia has been targeted throughout the war. “Russia is now experiencing attacks that they are not used to seeing,” Finkelstein says.

While cyberattacks against Russia have increased, there are hints that this may push the country further down the path of internet isolation. For the past few years, Russian officials have talked of creating its [own sovereign internet and breaking away from the global system](#). When the DDoS attacks started, Russia appeared to [geofence government websites](#), and at the start of March, according to [national media reports](#), the country’s Ministry of Digital Development told websites to improve their cybersecurity measures and keep control of their own domain names.

“I believe that full disconnect from the internet would still be an extreme approach, even now,” says Lukasz Olejnik, an independent cybersecurity researcher and consultant. “Furthermore, the government is apparently still in a kind of self-denial, acting as if nothing significant was happening due to the cyberattacks, or even due to the Western sanctions, too.” Despite this denial, Olejnik says, the country is still “doubling down” and pushing toward its long-term goal of a sovereign internet.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Report: NKoreans jailbreaking phones
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/north-korean-phone-jailbreakers/
GIST	<p>FOR MOST OF the world, the common practice of "rooting" or "jailbreaking" a phone allows the device's owner to install apps and software tweaks that break the restrictions of Apple's or Google's operating systems. For a growing number of North Koreans, on the other hand, the same form of hacking allows them to break out of a far more expansive system of control—one that seeks to extend to every aspect of their lives and minds.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the North Korea-focused human rights organization Lumen and Martyn Williams, a researcher at the Stimson Center think tank's North Korea-focused 38 North project, together released a report on the state of smartphones and telecommunications in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a country that restricts its citizens' access to information and the internet more tightly than any other in the world. The report details how millions of government-approved, Android-based smartphones now permeate North Korean society, though with digital restrictions that prevent their users from downloading any app or even any file not officially sanctioned by the state. But within that regime of digital repression, the report also offers a glimpse of an unlikely new group: North Korean jailbreakers capable of hacking those smartphones to secretly regain control of them and unlock a world of forbidden foreign content.</p> <p>"There has been a sort of constant battle between the North Korean government and its citizens over use of technology: Each time a new technology has been introduced, people have usually found a way to use it for some illicit purpose. But that hasn't really been done through this kind of hacking—until now," says Williams. "In terms of the future of free information in North Korea, it shows that people are still willing to try to break the government's controls."</p>

Learning anything about the details of subversive activity in North Korea—digital or otherwise—is notoriously difficult, given the Hermit Kingdom's nearly airtight information controls. Lumen's findings on North Korean jailbreaking are based on interviews with just two defectors from the country. But Williams says the two escapees both independently described hacking their phones and those of other North Koreans, roughly corroborating each others' telling. Other North Korea-focused researchers who have interviewed defectors say they've heard similar stories.

Both jailbreakers interviewed by Lumen and Williams said they hacked their phones—government-approved, Chinese-made, midrange Android phones known as the Pyongyang 2423 and 2413—primarily so that they could use the devices to watch foreign media and install apps that weren't approved by the government. Their hacking was designed to circumvent a government-created version of Android on those phones, which has for years included a certificate system that requires any file downloaded to the device to be "signed" with a cryptographic signature from government authorities, or else it's immediately and automatically deleted. Both jailbreakers say they were able to remove that certificate authentication scheme from phones, allowing them to install forbidden apps, such as games, as well as foreign media like South Korean films, TV shows, and ebooks that [North Koreans have sought to access for decades despite draconian government bans](#).

In another Orwellian measure, Pyongyang phones' government-created operating system takes screenshots of the device at random intervals, the two defectors say—a surveillance feature designed to instill a sense that the user is always being monitored. The images from those screenshots are then kept in an inaccessible portion of the phone's storage, where they can't be viewed or deleted. Jailbreaking the phones also allowed the two defectors to access and wipe those surveillance screenshots, they say.

The two hackers told Lumen they used their jailbreaking skills to remove restrictions from friends' phones, as well. They said they also knew of people who would jailbreak phones as a commercial service, though often for purposes that had less to do with information freedom than more mundane motives. Some users wanted to install a certain screensaver on their phone, for instance, or wipe the phone's surveillance screenshots merely to free up storage before selling the phone secondhand.

One of the two jailbreakers, by contrast, said he was motivated in part by the same kind of mentality that drives some hackers in the West, according to Sokeel Park, the country director for Liberty in North Korea, who also spoke with the same defector who was interviewed by Lumen. "There isn't necessarily a super rational reason for this kind of hacking," says Park. "It's just like, doing stuff because you *can*, playing this cat-and-mouse game to test your own abilities."

Exactly what technical methods the two hackers used to defy their devices' restrictions is far from clear, given their limited, secondhand accounts. But both described attaching phones to a Windows PC via a USB cable to install a jailbreaking tool. One mentioned that the Pyongyang 2423's software included a vulnerability that allowed programs to be installed in a hidden directory. The hacker says they exploited that quirk to install a jailbreaking program they'd downloaded while working abroad in China and then smuggled back into North Korea. The other hacker didn't make clear the source of his jailbreaking tool, but said he had been a student in a computer science group at Pyongyang's elite Kim Il Sung University.

The hackers Lumen describes are broadly representative of the two emerging classes of people jailbreaking phones in North Korea, says Nat Kretchun, the vice president for programs at the Open Technology Fund and a [longtime researcher of North Korean media and technology](#). "There are the folks who come out of Kim Il Sung University or Kim Chaek University or part of the North Korean state who are essentially building these tools and doing kind of cheeky things on the side to allow themselves a little bit of room to undo the things that they implemented themselves," says Kretchun, who has independently interviewed several North Korean jailbreakers. "Then there's this other class of folks who have some amount of computer science literacy and are spending so much time with the phones that they're basically mapping out exactly how the thing works in practice and finding pretty clever work-arounds."

Kretchun and other researchers say that the number of jailbreakers remains fairly small, given the rarity of computer literacy in the country and the difficulty of sharing the tools. Changes to North Korean phones to

	<p>disable their USB connections may have made jailbreaking even more of a challenge, says 38 North's Williams. But he points to a new law implemented in late 2020 that forbids "illegally installing a phone manipulation program" and includes a fine for possessing a smartphone without safeguards designed to block "impure publications," as the law puts it.</p> <p>"While it is difficult to estimate the number of North Koreans modifying their phones, and interviewees did not seem to think the practice was widespread," reads Lumen's report, "the existence of this specific wording would imply it is happening at a scale where authorities are aware and potentially concerned."</p> <p>Despite the relatively small scale of jailbreaking in the DPRK, Liberty in North Korea's Sokeel Park argues that even a small community of phone hackers represents a sign that North Koreans have the will to fight against government controls. He adds that jailbreakers elsewhere in the world should perhaps focus their efforts on building and distributing hacking tools designed to help them.</p> <p>"I think it's a very obvious call to action for the international community of technologists," Park says. "There is a dynamism there. This kind of hacking shows North Koreans are not passive subjects of oppression and surveillance and censorship. North Korean people are creating solutions and work-arounds so that they can learn things that the North Korean government doesn't want them to learn, sharing things the government considers subversive, and ultimately so they can create a challenge to the regime."</p>
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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	04/27 Terror offenders 'high status' in UK prisons
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/apr/27/terrorism-offenders-enjoy-high-status-in-prison-qcs-official-report-says
GIST	<p>Some terrorists in prison enjoy status and celebrity among their fellow inmates amid a culture of fear and violence in jails in England and Wales that is being exacerbated by staffing cuts, an official review has concluded.</p> <p>Jonathan Hall QC, the government's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, found that a pecking order of terror offenders can develop, based on the notoriety or charm of an extremist prisoner that means they may be held in high esteem by fellow inmates.</p> <p>"For some prisoners terrorism offences amount to a glamorous blow against the authorities, untainted by grubby personal motives and serving a wider purpose, giving them a distinctly heroic profile," Hall said.</p> <p>Other prisoners may be drawn to some terror inmates by their "personal charm" or they may attracted to Islamist extremism but doubt the sincerity of the prison imam and are seeking what they feel is "a more authoritative version of the faith".</p> <p>Some terror offenders may be seen as lending "credibility" to pre-existing groups in the prison.</p> <p>The review adds: "The fact that [terrorism] offenders are welcomed, rather than ostracised like paedophiles, is striking in itself, and illustrates the scale of the task in seeking to rehabilitate [terrorism] offenders and persuade them against further terrorist activity, when they are simultaneously enjoying a high status because of their previous offences."</p> <p>Hall, who carried out a review of terrorist activity in jails in England and Wales, said this was happening in a "fearful" prison environment where violence was increasing and staff numbers had dramatically diminished over time.</p>

The review said the number of frontline operational prison staff was cut by 26% between 2010 and 2017. Officials say staff went from being “confident and in charge” to “fire-fighting”. Relationships between staff and prisoners deteriorated and everything became a “fight”.

Among the examples of “Islamist gang-type activity” Hall identified was the case of Usman Khan, who stabbed two people to death during the 2019 London Bridge attack while out on licence following an earlier terror conviction. Hall said he tried to make connections with the notorious hate preacher Abu Hamza when they were both in prison.

The review said Khan had “admitted that whilst he was in prison he tried to ‘gain sort of points’ with the terrorist Abu Hamza” by the language he used to refer to non-Muslims to “prove his extremist credentials”.

It also said that “Sudesh Amman, who went on to commit the Streatham attack, considered that he had celebrity status at HMP Belmarsh on account of his terrorist conviction”.

He was automatically released from Belmarsh jail, halfway through his 40-month sentence for obtaining and distributing material used for terrorist purposes.

Amman was shot dead by armed undercover officers after he stole a knife from a hardware shop and began randomly stabbing members of the public on Streatham High Road, south London, on 2 February 2020.

The review added: “It is impossible to avoid the issue of whether increased attention to Islamist groups will lead to Muslim prisoners feeling unfairly singled out when they association with other Muslims. That is clearly a possibility, and an outcome that officials will have to work hard to avoid. Officials should be curious, open-minded, prepared to challenge, listen and explain.”

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HEADLINE	04/27 Charge: assist multiple terror organizations
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/irvine-man-indicted-for-attempts-to-assist-multiple-terrorist-organizations/
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors indicted an Irvine man on Wednesday, after he was allegedly found to have made multiple attempts in aiding terrorist organizations.</p> <p>The 24-year-old man, Jason Fong, was formally accused of attempting to assist two separate terrorist groups.</p> <p>Most recently, he was accused of allegedly trying to send weapons and supplies to Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, and Hamas.</p> <p>Prosecutors also further alleged that in 2020 Fong attempted to send training material on tactical, combat and weapons to HTS, which included information on how to make improvised explosive devices and chemical weapons.</p> <p>Again in 2020, he was accused of seeking to raise funds for Hamas.</p> <p>A press release states that Fong knew at the time of each of these attempts that the groups had been designated as foreign terrorists organizations by the United States government.</p> <p>Fong faces up to 20 years on each of the four counts of indictment.</p> <p>The investigation was being conducted by the FBI, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Homeland Security Investigations, the Irvine Police Department and the New York Police Department.</p> <p>Fong was previously arrested on weapons charges in 2020, after his home was raided by FBI agents.</p>

HEADLINE	04/28 Denmark: arrest, promoting IS social media
SOURCE	https://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/national-international/denmark-arrests-man-over-promotion-of-is-on-social-media/3221622/
GIST	<p>A man was arrested in Denmark on Wednesday on suspicion of violating anti-terrorism laws by allegedly promoting the Islamic State group on social media.</p> <p>Police said domestic security agency PET took part in the operation, but they did not give further details, including the suspect's age.</p> <p>“We still have a longer investigation ahead of us,” Copenhagen Police Inspector Dannie Rise said.</p> <p>PET reported last month that Denmark's “the biggest terrorist threat” remains people who sympathize with Islamic militants, including the Islamic State group and al-Qaida.</p> <p>The agency said “a significant number of terrorist attacks have been averted in Denmark” and the threat against the country “remains serious.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Terrorist watchlist encounters at border
SOURCE	https://cis.org/Bensman/US-Government-Now-Publishing-Terrorist-Watch-List-Encounters-American-Land-Borders
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas – Having covered the politically taboo threat of Islamic terrorist border crossings and even written a book about it, I have long had to contend with ungenerous government agencies that jealously guard all information about it from public disclosure.</p> <p>So few other people could have been more surprised to find a brand section on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection “Enforcement Statistics” page titled, “Terrorist Screening Database Encounters”. In other words, there’s now a public page where any American citizen can, for the first time, go to see the number of times federal agents have encountered an immigrant at both northern and southern land borders who was on the FBI’s terrorist watch list.</p>

▼ Terrorist Screening Database Encounters

This table provides a summary of OFO encounters of all persons at ports of entry with records within the TSDB at the time of their encounter.

	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22 Oct-Mar
Office of Field Operations TSDB Encounters at Land Border Ports of Entry of All Nationalities*						
Southwest Border	116	155	280	72	103	35
Northern Border	217	196	258	124	54	96
Total	333	351	538	196	157	131
U.S. Border Patrol TSDB Encounters Between Ports of Entry of Non-U.S. Citizens						
Southwest Border	2	6	0	3	15	27
Northern Border	0	0	3	0	1	0
Total	2	6	3	3	16	27
Percentage of Total USBP Encounters	0.0007%	0.0015%	0.0004%	0.0007%	0.0010%	0.0027%

One way to measure the significance of CBP providing such raw information to the general public is that, in the recent past, major American newspapers and television networks have staked their reputations on insisting that no terrorist suspects ever cross the border and that anyone who says otherwise, [like former President Donald Trump did](#) in 2018, [is a big, fat, fear-mongering, racist liar](#). Otherwise, [they refuse to report government](#) evidence when it does make it to the public.

The controversy over whether terrorist suspects cross the land border has left many Americans confused over the years as to what is and isn't a phony political narrative about this one of many border threats.

And yet there it is now in black and white on CBP's public-facing statistics page, right between "Gang Affiliated Enforcement" and "U.S. Border Patrol Recidivism" rates.

The statistics page can be improved. It lists just the raw numbers of encounters per fiscal year of known or suspected terrorists (KSTs) who showed up at a border port of entry, like a bridge over the Rio Grande, and also between ports of entry, meaning illegal entrants Border Patrol agents had to catch. Further breakdowns would be helpful.

The two categories differ significantly in meaning and implication.

Port of Entry Encounters

From the provided data, you can't read too much into the numbers at a controlled port of entry. These might, for instance, be individuals who drive a long-haul truck back and forth from Canada to Detroit,

flagging on the database multiple times a week, or an American importer who frequently moves between Nuevo Laredo and Laredo. So those numbers are way higher than the ones reflecting illegal border-crossers.

“POE totals may include multiple encounters of the same individual,” the new section notes in the postscript.

Most hits at a POE probably are not foreign nationals without legal status from beyond Canada, Mexico, or the United States. They may be Canadians or Americans or Mexicans who have legal status to travel back and forth, thus not overtly trying to run and hide as terrorists. (As a quick aside, agents see the watch list flag on their station’s computer screen and report the encounter and any other observable details back to the FBI Screening Center without letting the traveler know they’ve been flagged. The intel very helpfully goes straight to the case agents working the investigations.)

Perhaps more concerning might be POE encounters with new foreign national travelers on the terror watch list who show up for the first time to claim asylum, which will raise bigger alarms (and isn’t supposed to work out well for the asylum claimant). These individuals are usually denied entry.

The new statistics page doesn’t break any of this down but CBP might consider doing so later for greater clarity.

Terror Suspects Caught in the Brush

By contrast, those on the FBI watch list who are caught in the brush or woods between ports of entry raise different questions. Often enough, these individuals don’t even show up with real identification.

Homeland security agencies are left to figure out a lot of things from ground zero. Chances are that these individuals got on the watch list in a distant foreign nation, probably as a result of derogatory intelligence information coming from allied foreign services, the deployed American military, or an FBI investigation or CIA intelligence case. None of that is good. Most will claim asylum but be deported instead.

[Except in this case I wrote about recently](#) of a Lebanese-born Venezuelan who swam the Rio Grande River in December. ICE headquarters inexplicably overruled an FBI recommendation that he be detained as a flight risk and ordered him released to freedom in Detroit, where I last heard he was pursuing an asylum claim. The reason? He was overweight and at risk of catching Covid-19 in the detention facility.

Remember that not all terrorism-linked [“special interest aliens”](#) coming from nations of national security concern get as far as nomination and approval for the FBI terrorism watch list, which involves a lengthy, multi-tiered process.

Some 3,000 to 4,000 special interest aliens are caught between ports of entry every year from the same countries as those who do make the FBI terrorism watch list. Terror links may not come out until much later, after the individual is in the country. For example, a Somali who crossed into California, was flagged on no list, and [went on to conduct a double-vehicle ramming attack](#) carrying an ISIS flag in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Something else to keep in mind is that, as my CIS compadre Andrew “Art” Arthur [has recently figured out](#) from records in a federal court case, more than 650,000 immigrants who crossed the border since Biden’s inauguration were never caught. They are known as “got-aways”.

Lastly, not all of those on this database might even be suspected Islamic terrorists. In recent years, the FBI started to include members of transnational criminal organizations and “known affiliates” of watch-listed individuals. That’s no reason to rest on their laurels. They all “represent a threat to the United States”, a postscript note states, but their inclusion without a separate breakout makes it difficult to

	analyze the data as either a terrorism issue or an issue of dangerous transnational criminal aliens coming in.
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HEADLINE	04/27 Ex-Alabama student gets 7yrs; terror fund
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/former-alabama-student-sentenced-prison-hiding-terrorism-funds-al-qaeda
GIST	<p>A former University of Alabama student was sentenced Wednesday to seven and a half years in prison for concealing financing to the Islamic terrorist group, al Qaeda.</p> <p>Alaa Mohd Abusaad, 26, was also ordered to spend 10 years on supervised release following the prison term, prosecutors said in a statement.</p> <p>Abusaad pleaded guilty in 2019 to a charge of concealing terrorism financing after she told an undercover FBI employee how to send money to fighters engaged in terrorism and that money "is always needed," authorities said.</p> <p>She told the agent to use fake names and addresses when sending electronic transfers to avoid detection by police. Prosecutors said Abusaad also introduced the undercover agent to a financial facilitator who route money to "brothers that work with aq (al Qaeda)."</p> <p>The defense argued Abusaad's childhood and mental health issues made her vulnerable to the dangers of the internet, WBMA-TV reported. Court documents described a young girl ostracized by being the only Muslim family in housing projects in Tuscaloosa, where she faced bullying from other children and a teacher.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Activist's fight against 'terrorism' sentence
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/climate-activists-fight-terrorism-sentence-impact-future-protests/story?id=84345514
GIST	<p>In the fall of 2016, under the cover of darkness, Jessica Reznicek had a singular focus: to halt the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. At valve sites across America's heartland, she snuck through security fences, set fire to equipment, and used chemicals to burn holes in the pipeline itself.</p> <p>To Reznicek, a veteran climate activist, the damage was justified: a nonviolent act of civil disobedience in pursuit of saving the planet. The Justice Department saw it differently. After Reznicek publicly acknowledged her crimes and entered a guilty plea, federal prosecutors subsequently persuaded a judge to apply a sentencing increase known as the "terrorism enhancement" against her, putting her behind bars for eight years.</p> <p>The enhancement was applied "even though no person was ever hurt, no person was intended to be hurt, she wasn't charged with terrorism, and she didn't plead guilty to terrorism," said Bill Quigley, Reznicek's attorney and a professor emeritus at the Loyola University New Orleans Law School. "The terrorism enhancement doubled her amount of time in prison, which is troubling."</p> <p>Next month, when a panel of 8th Circuit Court of Appeals judges hears Reznicek's appeal, the terrorism enhancement will take center stage. Her case has emerged as a potential watershed moment in the eco-extremism movement, galvanizing free-speech advocates and renewing calls for reform. And the outcome could reverberate down through future American protest movements.</p> <p>Most frequently used against violent extremists or those with ties to foreign terrorist organizations, the terrorism enhancement is praised by national security officials and prosecutors as an effective tool of deterrence -- a stiff penalty meant to discourage others from engaging in similar behavior. But critics say the use of the enhancement against Reznicek reflects a broader push from the powerful oil industry to level harsh penalties against activists who target energy infrastructure.</p>

At a time when domestic violent extremism is on the rise, experts say Reznicek's appeal presents a fresh opportunity to reexamine how terrorism cases are prosecuted -- and who deserves to be labeled a terrorist.

Iowa homecoming

Long before Reznicek committed herself to a life of environmental activism, the Iowa native felt a deep connection to nature. In an interview with ABC News' Iowa affiliate, WOI, shortly after her sentencing, Reznicek described a childhood spent swimming in a local river, which she called her sanctuary.

"I've carried that love with me all my life," she said. "And I've also witnessed that desecration and the pollution that has occurred during my lifetime."

She described a spiritual calling that eventually led her to fight the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, an oil conduit that would eventually run more than 1,000 miles from North Dakota to Illinois. Beginning in April 2016, thousands of Native American and environmental activists gathered to [protest the project](#). Over time, Reznicek's actions grew increasingly dangerous.

"I entered the valve sites multiple times in multiple locations on multiple days," Reznicek told WOI. "Each time, there was a process of preparation for that, knowing full well what the legal consequences were."

In public and in court, Reznicek admitted to her actions -- which included setting fire to multiple construction vehicles -- and encouraged others to follow suit. She never hurt another person and said she never targeted human life. But her actions led to a delay in the pipeline's construction and more than \$3 million in damages.

"Everybody's afraid of these environmental groups and fear that it might look bad if you fight back with these people," said Kelcy Warren, CEO OF Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the Dakota Access Pipeline, during a cable news appearance in August 2017. "But what they did to us is wrong, and they are going to pay for it."

In February 2021, prosecutors secured a guilty plea from Reznicek on one felony count of conspiracy to damage an energy facility. Reznicek said she was prepared to serve time in prison, but she and her legal team expected "somewhere in the neighborhood of three or four years," according to Quigley.

Reznicek's aggressive brand of protest proved legally perilous: in June 2021, a federal judge handed her a hefty prison sentence and a damning new label: domestic terrorist.

Section 3A 1.4: The terrorism enhancement

In the wake of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, Congress enacted tougher penalties to intentionally deter acts of "intimidation or coercion" aimed at the government or civilian population. In the 1990s and early 2000s, multiple individuals associated with groups like the Earth Liberation Front faced terrorism-related sentences in connection with a string of arsons, including one that burned down a planned ski resort in Vail, Colorado.

"When an individual or group of individuals use an explosive device and incendiary device, engage in tight acts of targeted violence, they have crossed the line," said John Cohen, an ABC News contributor and former senior official in the Department of Homeland Security, describing the intention of the harsher penalties.

"They should expect -- regardless of how noble their cause -- that they will be investigated, arrested, prosecuted, and, if convicted, incarcerated as terrorists," Cohen said.

But critics complain that the law is too broad and too inconsistently applied. Terrorism sentences have historically been used against defendants with ties to ISIS or al-Qaida, or to violent domestic extremists like Cesar Sayoc, who was convicted in 2018 for mailing pipe bombs to members of Congress.

Notably, prosecutors did not seek terrorism enhancements in several other high-profile cases. Neither Dylann Roof, who pled guilty to massacring nine people at a Charleston bible study, nor James Fields, who was convicted of killing a Charlottesville demonstrator with his car, were sentenced with the terrorism enhancement.

"While [prosecutors] try to be consistent, they'll try to be fair, obviously, there's going to be different jurisdictions, different groups," DOJ federal prosecutor Joe Moreno told ABC News. "And ultimately, you're never going to get a system where it's uniformly applied everywhere."

More recently, of the 140 defendants sentenced to date in connection with the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, none have faced terrorism charges or sentences.

"In the court of common sense, individuals who went into the Capitol to engage in destructive behavior for the purposes of impeding congressional action and certifying the vote are, by its very definition, engaged in terrorism," Cohen said. "Unfortunately, under our current legal environment, it may not meet the elements of a terrorism offense."

Civil rights groups say prosecutors and judges have increasingly branded eco-saboteurs as terrorists, even as some resist applying that label in other more violent cases.

"I believe 100% that this is an overreach of power," said Sen. Ed Markey, D-Mass. "And it is absolutely imperative that we put guidelines in place."

Spotlight on Big Oil

Markey and other climate supporters say the oil and gas industry has spent years trying to silence opposition, lobbying state and federal lawmakers to enact tougher rules for protesters and increasing penalties for trespassing, damage and destruction at critical infrastructure sites.

"What the oil and gas industry wants is for these protesters to be charged as eco-terrorists, so that they are sentenced to longer time in prison as a deterrent against legitimate civil disobedience," Markey said. "And that's wrong."

In the last five years, 17 states have adopted so-called critical infrastructure protection laws that do just that -- and 40 additional bills are pending across the country, including a federal one.

"These laws introduced extraordinary penalties," said Elly Page, a senior legal adviser at the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. "Protesters who even momentarily cross onto property that contains a pipeline ... can now face multiple years in prison."

"They're discouraging people from turning out and have making their voices heard about what's really the crisis of our time -- the climate crisis," Page said.

In 2017, 80 Republican and four Democratic members of Congress -- who over the course of their careers received a combined \$36 million in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry -- pressed the Justice Department to treat all eco-saboteurs as domestic terrorists.

The Department of Homeland Security later grouped some environmental activists -- the so-called pipeline "valve turners" -- with mass killers and white supremacists in a description of domestic threats, according to [internal documents](#) obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request by the nonprofit group [Property of the People](#).

Meanwhile, Reznicek is in her first year behind bars as she prepares for her upcoming appeal of her sentence's terrorism enhancement. The Justice Department has argued that Reznicek's full sentence should remain in place, and that the evidence shows her conduct was targeting the government.

	<p>Supporters hope that a favorable outcome could set a new precedent for how activists are treated under the law. Quigley said that Reznicek's case will be watched closely by those involved in other American protest movements.</p> <p>"Nuclear, civil rights, Black Lives Matter and others ... see this as a really hyper criminalization of consequences for people who protest," he said.</p> <p>Moreno agreed that there's a lot on the line beyond Reznicek's prison term.</p> <p>"It's going to be a difficult uphill battle for her" to get the sentencing enhancement removed, Moreno said. "But if she is able to make that distinction, it would be a very significant one in how these cases are approached."</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 ICE removes Turkish national
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/customs-immigration/ice-el-paso-removes-turkey-national-with-ties-to-terrorism/
GIST	<p>On Thursday, April 21, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) El Paso Field Office removed an unlawfully present Turkish national, suspected of providing support to terrorist organizations.</p> <p>Volkan Gogebakan, 31, was flown from El Paso to Turkey on a commercial flight. Upon arrival on Friday at the Istanbul Airport, Gogebakan was turned over to Turkish officials.</p> <p>"Dangerous foreign criminals are a threat to homeland and border security as well as public safety," said Kenneth Genalo, acting field office director for ERO El Paso. "ICE is committed to keeping our community safe from individuals with any kind of nexus to terrorist organizations."</p> <p>Gogebakan illegally entered the United States without inspection on Sept. 23, 2021, near the Bridge of the Americas Port of Entry in El Paso. This area is directly north of the Rio Grande, which serves as the international boundary between the United States and Mexico.</p> <p>He was arrested by immigration authorities later that day, processed and charged with unlawful entry. The next day, he was booked into the El Paso County Detention Facility to await criminal prosecution and removal proceedings.</p> <p>On Oct. 7, 2021, he was convicted in federal court of unlawful entry, and committed to the custody of the U.S. Bureau of Prisons for 30 days.</p> <p>ERO El Paso officers took custody of Gogebakan on Oct. 22, 2021, and placed him in ICE custody at the El Paso Processing Center. On Jan. 12, ERO El Paso deportation officers served Gogebakan a Notice and Order of Expedited Removal.</p> <p>ICE focuses its civil immigration enforcement priorities on the apprehension and removal of noncitizens who pose a threat to our national security, public safety, and border security.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/28 Greenland's weather climate crisis
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/news/2022/apr/28/greenland-changing-weather-climate-crisis

GIST	<p>Despite its name, Greenland is mostly a land of snow and ice, with four-fifths of the country covered by an ice sheet. Yet its northernmost point, Peary Land (named after the explorer Robert Peary, widely credited as being the first person to reach the north pole), is actually ice free, because the air is so dry that snow does not fall there, making it a polar desert.</p> <p>As the world's largest island, with a land area of more than 2m sq km, Greenland stretches over 34 degrees of latitude, from 83 degrees north to 60 degrees north – roughly level with the Shetland Islands.</p> <p>Three-quarters of Greenland lies within the Arctic Circle, so the summers are brief and cool, while the winters are long and very cold. The town of Qaanaaq (also known as Thule) is one of the most northerly in the world, with average temperatures of just 5C in July, plummeting to -25C in February. Farther south, in the capital, Nuuk, temperatures are a few degrees higher.</p> <p>Greenland holds the unenviable record of the lowest temperature ever recorded in the northern hemisphere. In December 1991, near the summit of the Greenland ice sheet, it fell to -69.6C. But with the onset of the climate crisis, summer temperatures in the high 20s are now being recorded; an ominous sign for the future.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/28 Deforestation high despite COP26 promises
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/28/climate/deforestation-tree-loss.html
GIST	<p>Halting deforestation was one of the major commitments to come out of the international climate talks last year in Glasgow, but there was scant evidence of progress in 2021, according to a report released Thursday.</p> <p>The annual report by the World Resources Institute, a research group based in Washington, D.C., found that tropical regions lost 9.3 million acres of primary old-growth forest in 2021. That resulted in 2.5 billion metric tons of emissions of carbon dioxide, or about two and a half times as much as emitted by passenger cars and light trucks in the United States each year.</p> <p>Brazil had by far the largest share of forest loss, accounting for more than 40 percent of the total, followed by the Democratic Republic of Congo and Bolivia.</p> <p>Last year's total was a decline of 11 percent from 2020, but it was about equal to the amount lost in both 2018 and 2019.</p> <p>Rod Taylor, global director of the institute's global forests program, said that the essentially flat rate of deforestation over the last four years was not good "for the climate, for the extinction crisis, and for the fate of many forest peoples."</p> <p>Most forest loss in the tropics is linked to agriculture or other activities, like mining. Forests are clear cut and often burned, and these fires can grow out of control, adding to the devastation.</p> <p>In addition to adding planet-warming gases to the atmosphere, deforestation eliminates habitat for plants and animals, degrades land and affects weather patterns and flooding.</p> <p>The situation has become so dire that at the United Nations climate talks in Glasgow last November, 141 nations, including Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo, pledged to "halt and reverse" deforestation by 2030.</p> <p>Drastic steps will be needed to produce the consistent annual declines required to reach that goal, said Frances Seymour, a senior fellow at the institute.</p>

“The numbers we’re sharing today perhaps could be considered a baseline for assessing the effectiveness of the actions that they take to follow through” on those pledges, she said.

There was some good news in the report, especially from Asia. In Indonesia, forest loss declined by one-fourth from 2020, the fifth year in a row of falling totals. Malaysia also had a fifth straight year of declines, although forest loss in 2021 was only slightly less than in 2020.

Since suffering extensive forest and peat fires in 2016 that resulted in a huge loss of tree cover and widespread [severe air pollution](#), Indonesia has instituted tougher regulations on the palm oil industry and others responsible for most of the loss. Corporations have also been pressured to pledge to reduce deforestation.

“This indicates that corporate commitments and government actions are clearly working, and that Indonesia is heading in the right direction to make some of its climate commitments,” said Hidayah Hamzah, a senior manager with the institute’s Indonesia office.

A new law that has the potential to weaken environmental regulations in Indonesia is cause for concern, said Andika Putraditama, also in the Indonesia office. If the government fails to maintain adequate protective measures, he said, companies would need to increase efforts to provide voluntary safeguards, like the ethical supply chain movement that supports the use of sustainable materials.

In West Africa, Gabon and the Republic of Congo showed declines in tree loss. But large-scale deforestation continued in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which lost 1.2 million acres, largely as a result of small-scale agriculture and charcoal production.

In Brazil, tree-cover loss increased substantially in the western part of the Amazon basin. This could be linked to the development of roads and other infrastructure in the region, which allows mining and other forest-destroying activities to occur.

A recent study showed that the Amazon, the world’s largest tropical forestlands, is less able to [recover from disturbances like droughts and logging](#), and that at least part of the region is approaching a threshold where it will shift from forest to grasslands.

“That would release enough carbon into the atmosphere to blow the Paris Agreement goals right out of the water,” Ms. Seymour said. The implication of all of the report’s findings, she added, “is that we have to dramatically reduce emissions from all sources.”

“No one should even think anymore about planting trees instead of reducing emissions from fossil fuels,” she said. “It’s got to be both, and it’s got to be now before it’s too late.”

The report found that overall in the tropics, more than 27 million acres of forest cover was lost. But in its analysis the institute focuses on older primary forests in humid regions, which play by far the greatest role in keeping carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and in maintaining biodiversity.

The report is a collaboration between the institute and the [Global Land Analysis and Discovery](#) laboratory at the University of Maryland, which has developed methods to analyze satellite imagery to determine the extent of forest cover.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Reptiles: 1/5 th in world face extinction
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/reptiles-worldwide-face-risk-extinction-84345641
GIST	WASHINGTON -- Even the king cobra is “vulnerable.” More than 1 in 5 species of reptiles worldwide are threatened with extinction, according to a comprehensive new assessment of thousands of species published Wednesday in the journal Nature.

Of 10,196 reptile species analyzed, 21% percent were classified as endangered, critically endangered or vulnerable to extinction — including the iconic hooded snakes of South and Southeast Asia.

“This work is a very significant achievement — it adds to our knowledge of where threatened species are, and where we must work to protect them,” said Duke University ecologist Stuart Pimm, who was not involved in the study.

Similar prior assessments had been conducted for mammals, birds and amphibians, informing government decisions about how to draw boundaries of national parks and allocate environmental funds.

Work on the reptile study – which involved nearly 1,000 scientists and 52 co-authors – started in 2005. The project was slowed by challenges in fundraising, said co-author Bruce Young, a zoologist at the nonprofit science organization NatureServe.

“There’s a lot more focus on furrier, feathery species of vertebrates for conservation,” Young said, lamenting the perceived charisma gap. But reptiles are also fascinating and essential to ecosystems, he said.

The Galapagos marine iguana, the world’s only lizard adapted to marine life, is classified as “vulnerable” to extinction, said co-author Blair Hedges, a biologist at Temple University. It took 5 million years for the lizard to adapt to foraging in the sea, he said, lamenting “how much evolutionary history can be lost if this single species” goes extinct.

Six of the world's species of sea turtles are threatened. The seventh is likely also in trouble, but scientists lack data to make a classification.

Worldwide, the greatest threat to reptile life is habitat destruction. Hunting, invasive species and climate change also pose threats, said co-author Neil Cox, a manager at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s biodiversity assessment unit.

Reptiles that live in forest areas, such as the king cobra, are more likely to be threatened with extinction than desert-dwellers, in part because forests face greater human disruptions, the study found.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	04/27 DOJ: 31 indicted; OC Mexican Mafia
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/04/27/31-orange-county-mexican-mafia-members-charged-murder-racketeering/7431651097557/
GIST	<p>April 27 (UPI) -- Thirty-one people connected to the Orange County Mexican Mafia were charged as part of a 33-count indictment, which included murder charges, court document show.</p> <p>The indictment covers two murders, six attempted murders and related drug and gun charges, as well as racketeering offenses, the Justice Department said in a release.</p> <p>"The violence, drug-dealing and other criminal acts being committed in our communities by gangsters associated with the Mexican Mafia is being met with the strongest possible response by law enforcement," said U.S. Attorney Tracy L. Wilkison.</p> <p>"The Mexican Mafia allegedly preyed on vulnerable communities through fear, violence, and intimidation," said Justice Department Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite.</p>

Return to Top	<p>"This indictment sends a clear message that the Criminal Division, and our federal, state, and local partners, remain committed to protecting all of our communities from violence and exploitation."</p> <p>Mexican Mafia members allegedly have divided control of numerous areas in Southern California, with members controlling criminal activities in specific territory and receiving payments from rival gangs to allow them to deal drugs.</p> <p>Justice Department officials also accused the gang of directly engaging in heroin and methamphetamine distribution in and out of prisons and jails, exercising their authority over street gangs through murder, attempted murder and violent assaults.</p> <p>The unsealed indictment specifically mentions two slayings in 2017 in Orange County, Calif. The shooting deaths both use initials to identify the victims. It also details the six attempted murders, providing dates and names.</p> <p>Those charged are also accused of attempting to skirt charges related to the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act.</p> <p>"The subjects of this investigation engaged in some of the most horrific acts imaginable, and we are glad to have done our part to help end their corrupt influence over our community," said IRS Criminal Investigation Special Agent Ryan Korner.</p> <p>Of the 31 defendants charged in the indictment, 21 were already in custody, and nine were arrested Tuesday night and Wednesday morning and taken into federal custody.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Spokane new violent crime task force
SOURCE	https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2022/apr/27/how-spokanes-new-violent-crime-task-force-plans-to/
GIST	<p>Mayor Nadine Woodward and Spokane police Chief Craig Meidl fleshed out how the new Violent Crime Task Force will function at the mayor's State of the City address Wednesday.</p> <p>Woodward announced plans to formulate a task force following a rash of shootings across just a few days earlier this month, with the goal of cracking down on repeat offenders.</p> <p>The police department will assign two sergeants and five other officers to start, Meidl said.</p> <p>"Their job every day is to wake up and look at who are these repeat offenders that continue to go out and victimize the community," he said. "Their job is to go out and stop that and get ahead of it before they can victimize the community again."</p> <p>The effort is similar to Seattle's "High Utilizer" initiative, a Seattle City Attorney's Office program aimed at aggregating numerous misdemeanors into felony charges for more than 100 people collectively suspected of thousands of misdemeanors in the past five years, according to the Seattle Times.</p> <p>Meidl said the police department was deliberate to not eliminate any other SPD units to bring together the task force. He said SPD hopes to refill those units as more officers are hired in the coming months.</p> <p>"The task force is built on philosophies and successes of other specialty teams that the SPD has put together before," Woodward said. "And we're looking at approaches other cities have taken to quality of life crimes by packaging misdemeanor crimes into felony charges for those responsible for dozens and dozens of offenses."</p> <p>The formation of the task force comes amid complaints from the police department that individuals arrested on certain crimes are quickly released.</p> <p>Meidl said the task force will follow these defendants from the point of arrest to their appearances in court.</p>

	<p>“A lot of these judges aren’t getting the rest of the story of what’s happening with these individuals and the type of one-person crime wave they are,” he said, “so our goal is not only to arrest them to protect them, to keep the community safe, but also to really demonstrate to the judge this person is doing a lot of damage. They are a big threat to the community.”</p> <p>With 40 shootings in the first three months of the year, Spokane was on pace to top the 151 shootings recorded last year.</p> <p>Meidl said the string of shootings seen in the city stems not only from gang violence and drugs, but also domestic violence, property crime and other incidents.</p> <p>“The intent is to, one, get them off the street. Get those guns off the street,” he said, “but also send a message to the rest of the community that Spokane is not going to tolerate this.</p> <p>“If you’re going to go out and commit a crime, especially a crime with a gun, we’re not going to tolerate it. We’re going to come after you.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Proud Boys member guilty plea Jan 6 role
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/apr/27/proud-boys-capitol-attack-louis-enrique-colon-pleads-guilty
GIST	<p>A member of the far-right Proud Boys group on Wednesday pleaded guilty to obstructing police officers when he joined the 6 January 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol by supporters of then-president Donald Trump, in their attempt to overturn his election defeat.</p> <p>The plea agreement filed in federal court in Washington, DC, calls for Louis Enrique Colon of Missouri to admit to a single felony charge and cooperate with prosecutors.</p> <p>Colon admitted to crossing police barricades during the riot before climbing a wall to gain access to a higher level of the Capitol.</p> <p>While inside the Capitol building, Colon used his hands and a chair to obstruct police officers who were trying to lower retractable doors to stop rioters from streaming into the building.</p> <p>The attack followed a rally led by Trump near the White House, in which he urged thousands gathered to advance to the Capitol and “fight like hell” while both chambers of the US Congress were convening to certify Joe Biden’s victory over Trump in the 2020 election.</p> <p>Biden’s win was certified in the early hours of the following day after lawmakers, staff and journalists had fled for their lives during the deadly riot at the Capitol.</p> <p>Colon, 45, was charged in February 2021, along with four other members of the Kansas City metro chapter of the Proud Boys group. He is the first defendant in that case to plead guilty.</p> <p>A judge had imposed monitoring conditions on Colon while he awaited trial. Colon will be sentenced later this year, and he faces a statutory maximum of five years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.</p> <p>He will probably receive a reduced sentence because of his admission of responsibility and cooperation.</p> <p>Colon was not charged in the same conspiracy case as Enrique Tarrio, the former Proud Boys chairman and one of the most high-profile of the 800 people facing criminal charges relating to the riot.</p> <p>Colon’s plea comes two weeks after a Proud Boys leader, Charles Donohoe, pleaded guilty to obstructing an official proceeding, and assaulting and impeding police officers.</p>

Meanwhile, in a different criminal case, one of the dozens of police officers injured during the insurrection testified on Wednesday that he didn't punch or pick a fight with a retired New York police officer charged with attacking the officer.

Thomas Webster, whose trial on an assault charge started this week, claims he was acting in self-defense when he tackled Metropolitan police department officer Noah Rathbun outside the Capitol on 6 January 2021.

Rathbun said he reached out with an open left hand and pushed Webster in the face after the New York man shoved a bike rack at him. Rathbun said he was trying to move Webster back from a security perimeter that officers were struggling to maintain behind rows of bike racks.

"It's unfortunate to be in the nation's capital and be treated like that by another citizen," Rathbun said during the second day of Webster's trial.

Videos shown by prosecutors depict Webster shoving a bike rack at Rathbun before swinging a flag pole at the officer in a downward chopping motion, striking a metal barricade in front of the officer.

After Rathbun grabbed the broken pole and retreated, Webster charged at the officer and tackled him to the ground.

Rathbun said he started choking and couldn't breathe when Webster grabbed his gas mask and the chin strap pressed against the officer's neck.

Separately from the hundreds of criminal prosecutions, a special House of Representatives committee is investigating any links between Trump, his White House team, congressional Republicans and the insurrection.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Wrongful conviction, freed after 31yrs jail
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/us/florida-wrongful-conviction-thomas-raynard-james.html
GIST	<p>Prosecutors said it appeared to be a "chance coincidence."</p> <p>After two men entered an apartment in the Coconut Grove section of Miami on Jan. 17, 1990, and one of them fatally shot a man during a robbery, witnesses and tipsters said the gunman was named Thomas James or Tommy James.</p> <p>That led the police to put a photo of Thomas Raynard James in a lineup, setting in motion a case of mistaken identification that led Mr. James, then 23, to be convicted of first-degree murder and armed robbery on Jan. 11, 1991. He was sentenced to life in prison.</p> <p>But Mr. James never gave up trying to prove his innocence. He investigated his case while in prison, and his mother, Doris Strong, knocked on doors, looking for answers, according to Mr. James's lawyer, Natlie G. Figgers.</p> <p>On Wednesday, their efforts were finally validated when a judge approved a motion by prosecutors to vacate Mr. James's conviction and sentence, setting him free after he had spent more than half of his life — over 31 years — in prison.</p> <p>The Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office said an investigation that it conducted in cooperation with Ms. Figgers determined that not only did reasonable doubt exist in the conviction, but also that "Thomas Raynard James is actually innocent of the charges."</p> <p>"In brief, what appears to be a chance coincidence that the defendant, Thomas Raynard James, had the same name as a suspect named by witnesses and anonymous tipsters as 'Thomas James,' or 'Tommy</p>

James” led to his “mistaken identification” as the gunman who fatally shot Francis McKinnon, prosecutors wrote in court papers asking for the conviction to be thrown out.

Just before he was released on Wednesday, Mr. James, 55, still handcuffed and dressed in a red prison uniform, appeared at a news conference with his mother and prosecutors. He did not speak, but Ms. Figgers said he was “eager to start his life” and hoped to start a nonprofit to help others who have been wrongfully convicted.

Ms. Figgers credited Tristram Korten, whose [investigation of Mr. James’s conviction](#) was published in GQ in July 2021, with helping to bring the case to the attention of the prosecutors after years of unsuccessful efforts by Mr. James and his family.

“He was always hopeful that one day someone would see the truth and the facts and would come to his defense,” Ms. Figgers said. “As of today, he’s grateful that people listened to his cries, and he’s just grateful to have the opportunity to live his life.”

Katherine Fernandez Rundle, the Miami-Dade state attorney, said the case pointed to the vulnerability of eyewitness identification. Mr. James’s conviction rested primarily on the testimony of Dorothy Walton, Mr. McKinnon’s stepdaughter, who had been in the apartment and had identified Mr. James as the gunman after the police put his photo in a lineup.

“I’m positive of it,” she testified during the trial, according to court papers. “I will never forget his face. I will never forget his eyes.”

No physical evidence tied Mr. James or anyone else to the crime, prosecutors said.

Over the years, Ms. Walton began to waver in her certainty about Mr. James, prosecutors said. Although reluctant to rehash the case and fearful that Mr. James could take revenge on her if he were released, she eventually “voiced concerns that maybe she had made a mistake,” and said she “wouldn’t want to go to her grave with the possibility that she may have made a mistake,” court papers said. She told investigators that, as a “good Christian woman,” she would pray on it.

On April 12, after prosecutors subpoenaed her to testify under oath, Ms. Walton told investigators that she “now believes she made a mistake” in her identification of Mr. James, and that she did not attribute her change to any “outside influence,” prosecutors said.

Ms. Fernandez Rundle called it “an unfortunate mistaken-identity case.”

“Around the country, eyewitness testimony, absent any forensic evidence, is always vulnerable,” she said.

Ms. Fernandez Rundle added that a different man named Tommy James told investigators that he had been eyeing Mr. McKinnon’s apartment with his cousin, Vincent Williams, for a possible robbery in the days before the murder.

That Tommy James, however, was behind bars when Mr. McKinnon was killed, she said. Mr. Williams later told Tommy James that he and another man had committed the robbery and murder. Mr. Williams has since died. The other man has denied any involvement.

While Ms. Fernandez Rundle called Mr. James’s release from prison a “joyous” occasion for his family, she said it was frustrating for Mr. McKinnon’s relatives “because what they believed was a just result for the loss of their loved one has been stolen from them.”

“We believe one of the two men who did this will never be held accountable for the loss of their loved one,” Ms. Fernandez Rundle said, referring to Mr. Williams. “The second, we’re just not sure. We will continue to look at it as a cold case.”

HEADLINE	04/27 Colombia officials admit to war crimes
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/world/americas/colombia-war-crimes.html
GIST	<p>It was a moment many Colombians thought they would never see.</p> <p>A military general and 10 others acknowledged this week that they had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, testifying at an emotional two-day hearing that was the first of its kind in a special court set up to confront the legacy of Colombia's crushing civil war.</p> <p>Seated on a stage at a theater in Ocaña, a small city in northern Colombia that was the scene of many of the crimes, the general, nine other military officials and a civilian admitted to orchestrating the killings of at least 120 civilians and trying to pass them off as rebel combatants in a case known as the "false positives" scandal.</p> <p>The killings, which were used to bolster the country's argument that it was winning the war, has become one of the most emblematic of the country's traumatic internal conflict, which dates back to the 1960s.</p> <p>The relatives of the dead — many of them the mothers, fathers and siblings of murdered young men — have long called for accountability. And many sat on the stage, opposite the accused perpetrators as they spoke.</p> <p>"I offer my solidarity and will help to try to restore the damage and pain caused. I want to express to you that I feel great remorse that tears my soul," said retired Brigadier General Paulino Coronado Gámez during the hearing. He added, "I know that we affect entire families, fathers, mothers, children, grandchildren. We leave them and leave a great emptiness."</p> <p>The public admission of guilt was held by the country's Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a court set up as part of a 2016 peace deal between the Colombian government and the country's largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC.</p> <p>It is part of larger efforts around the world to address systemic violations of human rights through a process known as transitional justice, and builds on similar truth and reconciliation processes in countries like Argentina following a dictatorship in the 1980s and South Africa following apartheid in the 1990s.</p> <p>The hearing, according to Colombian court officials, represents the first time that perpetrators have admitted to committing war crimes and crimes against humanity as a result of a court created by a peace accord.</p> <p>Admissions of such crimes are rare — and conflicts endure — because perpetrators fear prison, while victims say offering blanket amnesty would be unjust.</p> <p>Eduardo González, an expert on transitional justice based in Peru, said the Colombian hearings show that there is a third route — a way to use the justice system to extract confessions and impose a lesser form of punishment than locking people away for decades.</p> <p>"I believe this will be a model to look to in other conflicts," he said.</p> <p>In the Colombian court, those admitting to committing crimes will not receive prison sentences but instead will be given so-called restorative sanctions, like house arrest or hard labor. Facing their victims in the hearings is part of the process.</p> <p>Still, the alternative sentences, which are a core principle of the court, have been criticized by some Colombians as going too easy on war criminals.</p>

During the hearing, the military officials wore civilian clothes, despite requests from some victims that they wear their uniforms, while the families of the dead wore black T-shirts that read: “Who gave the order?”

Individuals on both sides cried repeatedly.

In their testimony, officials described how they engaged in a deliberate strategy in which they recruited everyday Colombians, many of them students and poor farmers, with promises of jobs, then killed them and reported the deaths as combat kills.

“Today, I want the world to know that they were peasants,” Néstor Guillermo Gutiérrez, a former corporal in the Colombian military, said of his victims, “that as a member of the military, I cowardly assassinated them, I stole their children’s dreams, I ripped out their mother’s hearts, because of pressure, to produce results, to produce false results, to make a government happy. It’s not right.”

The court’s magistrates believe that their victims are just a small fraction of those killed between 2002 and 2008, during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe, as part of the false positives strategy. In all, the court said in a [recent investigative report](#) that the military is responsible for killing 6,402 civilians and claiming they were rebels.

For years, many Colombians have demanded to know who was the highest figure with knowledge of the scheme, who was the highest figure to orchestrate it and why Mr. Uribe did not stop it.

Human rights groups and the United Nations human rights office had raised alarm about suspicious deaths at least [as far back as 2005](#).

The hearing did not answer who was ultimately responsible for the strategy. General Coronado is the highest-ranking official to admit responsibility in the false positives case, but his confession focused on his failure to oversee others.

“I did not comply with the first lesson they gave me when I entered military school: The commander is responsible for what his subordinates do and do not do,” he said in court. “I accept my responsibility for having served as a hierarchical superior.”

The hearings also highlighted a level of institutional coordination designed to cover up the truth.

“We stayed up all night doing documentation, changing documentation, even deleting documentation,” said Juan Carlos Chaparro, a retired major. “And always, after everything was over, tarnishing the name of their relatives, calling them what they really were not.”

Another military official, former Second Sgt. Sandro Mauricio Pérez said: “I became a murderer, a monster for society. I represent for some of you a death machine.”

Investigators at the special court are examining other deaths and more indictments could follow.

Several relatives of the dead spoke at the hearing about getting only partial justice. They acknowledged that they were learning some of the truth, but not all of it, that perpetrators were taking responsibility, but that others who gave the orders also needed to be held to account.

“I’m here to speak not only for my son, but for thousands of victims,” said Carmenza Gómez, the mother of Víctor Gómez, who disappeared in 2008 and was found dead days later in Ocaña at just 23 years old.

“We know that there are powerful people behind you,” Ms. Gómez said. “We need names.”

The false positives case is just one of many crimes being examined by the court. Last year, magistrates [indicted](#) eight former FARC leaders, accusing them of orchestrating a kidnapping-for-ransom

operation that resulted in more than 20,000 victims, some of whom were raped or murdered. The kidnappings amount to crimes against humanity, according to the indictment.

The former FARC leaders have admitted guilt, and will participate in a similar public hearing in the coming months.

Sentencing in both cases will come later. A larger report on the facts of the war, compiled by a truth commission, will be published in the coming months.

Colombia's conflict with the FARC began in the 1960s, when two communist leaders declared a rebellion against a state, vowing to transform a vastly unequal society.

The decades-long war — involving left-wing guerrilla groups, right-wing paramilitaries, the military, drug cartels and the United States, which supplied and advised the military — killed at least 220,000 people and displaced more than five million.

The war between the FARC and government ended in 2016, when the two sides [signed a peace deal](#). But despite the accord, many parts of the country remain without a significant state presence — which has helped [fuel the rise](#) of new armed groups.

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace is meant to help the country establish a common story about the facts of the conflict and open the door for a new beginning.

"May this never happen again," said the former corporal, Mr. Gutiérrez, in his testimony.

Speaking of the families that were his victims, he said: "Imagine, the rebels arrived, beat them down; the paramilitaries arrived, and beat them down; and we, the army, arrived, and they trusted us. We deceived them, we lied to them and we murdered their families. God forgive me."

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HEADLINE	04/27 Backlog: 10,000 untested sex assault kits
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/ending-the-backlog-how-washington-state-is-working-through-10000-untested-sexual-assault-kits
GIST	<p>Many survivors of sexual assault in Washington state are a long way away from getting justice, but progress is being made.</p> <p>The problems first surfaced publicly in 2014 when a non-profit founded by Law & Order: SVU star Mariska Hargitay began sending public disclosure requests to police agencies across the country.</p> <p>They wanted to know how many untested sexual assault kits they had. The Seattle Police Department responded that there were more than 1,200. That kicked off a statewide conversation.</p> <p>"It confirmed that we had a system that was broken," said Rep. Tina Orwall of the 33rd Legislative District (Kent). "One of the first things I asked law enforcement was 'how would you catch a serial rapist?'"</p> <p>During the January 2015 legislative session, Orwall sponsored a bill requiring all backlogged sexual assault kits to be tested.</p> <p>But first, an audit would be done to find out how many kits were sitting in evidence rooms across the state.</p> <p>The results were staggering.</p>

"What was happening - which is tragic - is those kits were sitting on shelves all across the state," said Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson. "They were not being submitted for testing. Each one of those kits is a survivor's story."

More than 10,000 untested kits had been gathering dust. By that point, there were 1,600 in Seattle, 400 more than the 2014 count.

Snohomish and Pierce counties each had more than 1,000 kits - some more than a decade old.

"The way I look at it is 'What if it was my kid that it happened to?' I know I'd be outraged if it was her sexual assault kit that was sitting on a shelf in an office somewhere and nobody seemed to give a damn," said Ferguson. "So that's what motivated me personally. I knew there were thousands of these stories out there - thousands of these victims to try to help."

In 2017, the Attorney General's office was awarded \$3 million in grant money to start the Washington State Sexual assault Kit initiative - an ambitious project aiming to reduce the backlog to zero and speeding up the testing of new kits.

"Not only did we want to test every kit, but we wanted to set up a system that would support survivors, that would rapidly test kits, so this would never happen again," said Orwall.

It's a two-pronged approach overseen by the Washington State Patrol's Crime Lab.

Bode Technology Group (VA), DNA Labs International (FL), and Sorenson Forensics (UT) are the three private labs approved to handle the backlog of kits.

The crime lab assigned local law enforcement agencies to each private lab. The local agencies send their kits directly to the labs. The labs process the kits, then sends the results to the state patrol crime lab.

The crime lab analyses the results. If a DNA profile is found, the state patrol uploads it to the FBI's combined DNA indexing system, better known as the CODIS database.

As of April 7, 2022:

- 9,606 kits have been submitted for testing
- 6,234 kits have been fully tested
- Of those 2,541 have produced usable DNA

That does not mean an assault did not occur.

In the other 3,000+ cases, it is possible the attacker wore a condom, didn't leave DNA behind, or that by the time samples were taken there was no DNA left.

Of the 2,500 DNA samples that have been uploaded to CODIS, there have been 1,400 hits.

More than 1,100 are linked to offenders whose names and identities are listed in the database. While 270 have matched to other cases, meaning the attacker is a serial rapist who is still on the loose.

While the private labs are chipping away at the backlog, a new 'high-throughput lab' in Vancouver, Washington is handling recent cases.

"We said what we want to see is every sexual assault kit tested within 45 days. Tell us what you need to make that happen," said Orwall.

High throughput means that computers and robotic equipment do most of the lab work - freeing up time for the 11 scientists who work at the lab to do what humans do best - investigative analysis and problem-solving.

	<p>The scientists extract a DNA sample from the sexual assault kit, put it inside a special tube that the robot is able to open and then walk away.</p> <p>The computer-run robotic equipment handles mixing chemicals and doing all the readouts and printouts, tasks that used to take up most of a lab scientist's time.</p> <p>The high throughput lab receives an average of 211 kits each month sent in by agencies across the state.</p> <p>By law, the kits need to be sent to the lab within 30 days from the time they are collected and processed within 45 days of arriving at the lab.</p> <p>"To submit yourself to one of these tests, it is very invasive, it is not easy and that is putting it mildly," said Ferguson. "And we need to do our part to honor that person who has gone through that experience to make sure we preserve that evidence, get it tested, and then importantly at the backend, start finding the people who committed these acts, and put them away."</p> <p>Representative Orwall hopes this will encourage future victims to have confidence in the justice system.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Seattle CAO defends decision to drop cases
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/this-backlog-is-shameful-seattle-city-attorney-defends-decision-to-drop-nearly-2000-cases-in-backlog
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Four months into her new job as Seattle City Attorney, Ann Davison and Natalie Walton-Anderson, her chief criminal prosecutor, defended their decision in front of the City Council not to prosecute 2,000 cases.</p> <p>Davison and Walton-Anderson explained to members of the council's Public Safety Committee that the decision was hard to make and necessary in order to break up the backlog of 5,000 cases they inherited from Pete Holmes, the former city attorney.</p> <p>"We had to determine a prioritization of the types of cases that were left in the backlog," Davison told council members. "This backlog is shameful."</p> <p>Walton-Anderson showed a graph to council members that showed the backlog was just under 2,000 cases at the beginning of 2019, but grew to 5,000 when Davison took office in January 2022.</p> <p>During 2020 and much of 2021, trials at the Seattle Municipal Court were suspended because of the pandemic.</p> <p>"There are approximately 400 cases in the backlog that have past the statute of limitations," Walton-Anderson said. "Those cases have to be declined because we cannot take action on cases that pass the statute of limitations."</p> <p>Seattle's new City Attorney, who ran on a 'tough on crime' platform, will not be prosecuting nearly 2,000 cases in an effort to ease a case backlog.</p> <p>The city attorney has decided to drop prosecutions in 921 theft cases, 469 property destruction cases, and 420 trespassing cases in the backlog.</p> <p>Her office will still prosecute backlogged cases that involve crimes against people, including 971 domestic violence cases, 949 Assault cases, 469 DUI's, 454 harassment cases, and 170 that involve weapons charges.</p>

	<p>An exception will be people who are part of the office's "High Utilizer Offender" list. These are offenders that use up more than the average criminal's share of court resources.</p> <p>One person on that list is 38-year-old Steven Rich. He has had 73 cases referred by Seattle Police to the City Attorney's Office for prosecution, 57 of those since 2017. The majority, 43, involves theft.</p> <p>According to the State Patrol offender reports, Rich has been convicted of 35 gross misdemeanors, 10 misdemeanors and 25 non-felony violations. He's currently being held in the King County Jail on multiple theft charges with bail set at \$6,700.</p> <p>Despite all the cases and convictions against him, he still gets out of jail only to commit more crimes.</p> <p>"That someone who has been ignored, repeatedly, allowed to continue criminal activity and no one has said that they care enough for that person and intervene in that individual's life," Davison said, referring to people on the list in a March interview.</p> <p>Walton-Anderson told the council the office is making charging decisions 19 days on-average after receiving a case referral from Seattle Police. The goal of the office is five days.</p> <p>Several members of the city council thanked the Davison and Walton-Anderson for their presentation but did not ask any significant questions of the city attorney.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Spokane: 2 USAF charged; stealing ammo
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/2-air-force-staff-sergeants-charged-with-stealing-ammunition
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Two Fairchild Air Force Base staff sergeants face charges of stealing thousands of rounds of ammunition from the Spokane, Washington, base in a case with antigovernment overtones.</p> <p>John I. Sanger and Eric Eagleton were named in a criminal complaint unsealed in federal court in Spokane on Tuesday. The complaint accused both men of taking the ammunition for personal use at a shooting range near Fishtrap Lake, The Spokesman-Review reported Wednesday.</p> <p>The Inland Northwest Joint Terrorism Task Force had been investigating Sanger after linking him with a pair of social media accounts that made antigovernment statements in the months between the 2020 presidential election and the storming of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, according to court documents.</p> <p>In a comment posted Dec. 2, 2020, one of the accounts linked to Sanger said: "I think the capital needs to be seized No trial or chance to escape," according to court records.</p> <p>Four days later, the same account wrote, "They defrauded our election system and are getting away with it. That means this system has run it's course. People have to die," according to court documents.</p> <p>An undercover agent working with the Air Force's Office of Special Investigations began chatting with Sanger, who "told the (agent) he is actively recruiting in hopes of forming a local cell of like-minded individuals."</p> <p>Last month, the undercover agent and Sanger met Eagleton at a truck stop before going target-shooting. The agent was wearing a recording device, and Eagleton told the agent that members of the base's Combat Arms Training Management section routinely stole ammunition, "up to 3,000 rounds in a day," according to court documents.</p> <p>During the meeting, Eagleton also discussed "his anti-Semitic views and dislike for Jews," according to court documents.</p>

	<p>Air Force Office of Special Investigations agents observed the men shooting ammunition taken from cans that appeared similar to those used for combat arms training. The packaging contained numbers that a check of base records showed had been expended on-base in training exercises, according to court documents.</p> <p>Both men face charges of conspiracy to commit theft of government property and possession of stolen ammunition. The offense can carry up to a five-year prison sentence.</p> <p>The office of the Federal Defenders of Eastern Washington had not yet assigned an attorney to Sanger. Eagleton's attorney David Miller could not be immediately reached for comment</p> <p>In a statement, U.S. Attorney for Eastern Washington Vanessa Waldref commended FBI and Air Force investigators for working together to build the case.</p> <p>"So many of those who serve at Fairchild Air Force Base are career public servants who sacrifice their time, energy, and even their lives to keep America safe," Waldref said. "When individuals put their own interests ahead of others and abuse the public trust, those individuals dishonor the countless public servants who dedicate their lives to government and military service."</p> <p>"I am in awe of how our law enforcement partners came together to halt this dangerous conspiracy," said Brig. Gen. Terry Bullard, commander of the Air Force's Office of Special Investigations, in a written statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Seattle: 13 arrests; major retail crime ring
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-arrest-13-in-large-organized-retail-theft-investigation-near-northgate
GIST	<p>SEATTLE – Thirteen people are now behind bars for their part in a major retail crime ring.</p> <p>Seattle police say they have been working with loss prevention staff at two retailers in the Northgate neighborhood to find the shoplifting suspects. Many of them allegedly took off with hundreds of dollars in items.</p> <p>The work led police to find several containers of laundry detergent, kitchen knives, one vacuum, sneakers, a tablet computer, car speakers, 11 Spam cans, and a backpack stuffed with jeans.</p> <p>Police say one suspect even paid for several food items at one of the stores before stealing two bags of shirts and a USB fan.</p> <p>All 13 suspects were arrested and were given trespass admonishments, keeping them from going back to the stores.</p> <p>One suspect, who had already been banned from one of the retailers, was booked for burglary.</p> <p>Another woman was found with 100 fentanyl pills, fentanyl powder and a scale. She was arrested for narcotics possession with intent to deliver.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Seattle police probe laser strikes on planes
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-investigating-reports-of-two-planes-hit-by-laser-strikes-near-space-needle
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Authorities are investigating two separate instances where a plane was hit by a laser strike believed to have originated near the Space Needle.</p>

	<p>The Port of Seattle contacted the Seattle Police Department just after 9 p.m. on April 22 to investigate reports of a laser strike affecting a pilot. Investigators believe the laser was in the area of the Space Needle.</p> <p>Officers were called April 26 at about 9:30 p.m. for a green laser strike affecting another plane. The laser seems to have come from the base or near the base of the Space Needle, police said.</p> <p>No suspect has been located.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Vandals warn Seattle: you sweep, we strike
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/you-sweep-we-strike-seattle-parks-building-vandalized-in-apparent-response-to-encampment-removals/
GIST	<p>In an apparent comment on homeless encampment clearings in the city, a Seattle Parks and Recreation building was vandalized over the weekend with a message to the city: “You sweep, we strike.”</p> <p>According to Rachel Schulkin, a spokesperson for the Parks and Recreation Department, the building on Dexter Avenue in South Lake Union was vandalized sometime between Saturday night and Sunday morning.</p> <p>“Several windows were broken, cars damaged, and there was graffiti sprayed on the outside walls,” Schulkin said Wednesday. “The graffiti said, ‘You sweep, we strike.’”</p> <p>The words appear to reference city’s removal of homeless encampments, referred to by some as “sweeps,” which the Parks and Recreation department helps coordinate.</p> <p>Since Mayor Bruce Harrell took office in January, the city has upped its encampment-clearing efforts, with 30 camps cleared in his first 100 days compared to 70 total clearings in 2021.</p> <p>The removals have garnered a strong reaction from community advocates, including a weekslong standoff with protesters who occupied one downtown encampment until Harrell ordered a removal in March.</p> <p>Harrell condemned the vandalism in an emailed statement Wednesday, calling for a safer environment for employees of the department and the city’s Unified Care Team, which works with the public during encampment removals.</p> <p>“Our Parks employees, along with the HOPE Team and workers from all the departments who make up our Unified Care Team, do incredible work to support people experiencing unsheltered homelessness,” Harrell said. “They have my full support — and they deserve to feel safe at work.</p> <p>“These employees are in positions to help people. In the first quarter of this year, the Unified Care Team has referred more than 300 people to shelter, helping make a tangible difference in the lives of the most vulnerable.”</p> <p>Harrell, whose concern with graffiti was prevalent throughout his campaign, announced a public effort to address graffiti and litter last week, calling May 21 a citywide day of service for volunteers to help spruce up the city.</p> <p>Five days later, the building was vandalized.</p> <p>“This kind of vandalism is wholly unacceptable — it does nothing to help people move out of homelessness and into shelter with services. It does nothing to restore parks, playfields, and public spaces. The way to make change is to engage, not to drive division,” Harrell said.</p>

	According to Schulkin, a police report has been filed, but there were no known suspects as of Wednesday evening.
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HEADLINE	04/27 Oregon Gov. grants clemency of murderer
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Oregon-governor-s-clemency-of-murderer-unleashes-17131385.php
GIST	<p>SALEM, Ore. (AP) — In 1994, Kyle Hedquist led a teenager down a remote logging road, then shot her in the back of the head because he feared she might tell police about burglaries he'd committed.</p> <p>This month, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown granted clemency to Hedquist, who was serving a life sentence without parole after being convicted of murdering Nikki Thrasher when he was 17. Brown's act is unleashing a storm of criticism from prosecutors and law enforcement.</p> <p>"The executive clemency granted by Gov. Brown in this case is shocking and irresponsible," Douglas County Sheriff John Hanlin said Tuesday in a statement. Hedquist, now 45, was convicted in Douglas County Circuit Court in 1995.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Brown defended her clemencies, comparing them to President Joe Biden's granting of clemency Tuesday to 78 people, though those were all for nonviolent crimes.</p> <p>"Teenagers, even those who have committed terrible crimes, have a unique capacity for growth and change," Brown said in social media posts in which she applauded Biden's action, adding: "We are a state and a nation of second chances."</p> <p>The U.S. Supreme Court, in a 2012 ruling, said only the rare, irredeemable juvenile offender should serve life in prison, but that applies in federal cases.</p> <p>Some two dozen states have banned sentencing juveniles to life without parole, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Sentencing Project, which advocates for humane responses to crime. The Democrat-dominated Oregon Legislature passed such a law in 2019, but the state Supreme Court has ruled it's not retroactive.</p> <p>The clemency of Hedquist has fueled Republican complaints that Brown, a Democrat who is not running for reelection this year because of term limits, is soft on crime.</p> <p>"As with many others, the facts of this case are outrageous and brutal," Oregon Senate Republican Leader Tim Knopp said Tuesday. "The Governor continues to let violent criminals out of prison, and Democrats in the majority remain silent."</p> <p>However, Brown said she has denied most clemency requests.</p> <p>"Clemency is an action I reserve for individuals who have demonstrated that they have made incredible changes in their lives to rehabilitate themselves, take accountability for their crimes, and dedicate themselves to making their communities a better place," Brown said.</p> <p>While locked up in the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem, Hedquist spent over 20 years volunteering for hospice care services, said Liz Merah, Brown's spokeswoman.</p> <p>Hedquist wrote about caring for the dying inmates in a piece that was awarded "honorable mention in memoir" in PEN America's 2019 Prison Writing Contest.</p> <p>"I couldn't have known all those years ago that death would bring my humanity back," Hedquist wrote. "So I sat, I listened, their teary-eyed regurgitation of their crimes burned my ears, they left a bitter taste in my mouth as I consumed the confessions ... but somehow just being with them and listening lightened their burden before death stepped in to take them."</p>

This month, Hedquist was released to the Salem home of a former prison chaplain after a suitable place could not be found for him in Douglas County, where Hedquist was from.

Marion County District Attorney Paige Clarkson and Sheriff Joe Kast, whose county includes Salem, issued a public safety notice Saturday in which they expressed “significant safety concerns surrounding the sudden and ill-planned governor’s commutation.”

“Hedquist tricked the victim into driving him to a rural Douglas County location where he shot the victim execution-style in the back of the head and dumped her body along the road,” Clarkson and Kast said. “Hedquist admitted killing her to eliminate a witness in hope of preventing his own capture.”

Brown accused “several district attorneys” of scoring political points by stoking public fears in these cases. Oregonians granted clemency have demonstrated they have turned their lives around and pose a low risk to the public, she said.

Merah, Brown’s spokeswoman, said Hedquist’s conditions of sentence commutation include lifetime supervision and GPS ankle monitoring for at least six months.

“If Mr. Hedquist violates any terms of his post-prison supervision, the governor can revoke his commutation,” Merah said.

Since taking office in 2015, Brown has granted 1,148 sentence commutations — 963 of them to minimize the spread of COVID-19 in prisons, Merah said. Also among the total were 41 commutations for inmates who fought wildfires and 72 who committed crimes as juveniles and were sentenced to more than 15 years. Brown also granted 63 pardons. Commutations reduce prison terms, while pardons forgive defendants of crimes.

The number of clemencies from governors varies widely across the nation.

— Democratic Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee, in office since 2013, has issued 1,266 clemency orders, including 422 because of the pandemic and 35 for marijuana convictions.

— California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat in office since 2019, has granted 112 pardons, 109 commutations and 34 reprieves.

— Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican who took office in 2019, has granted clemency to 17 people. The Republican governors of Mississippi, South Carolina and Idaho have issued zero clemencies during their terms.

— Missouri Gov. Mike Parson, a Republican, has granted 293 clemency actions since 2020, including 275 pardons and 18 commutations. Parson said there was a backlog of clemency requests when he took office following the 2018 resignation of fellow GOP Gov. Eric Greitens.

— Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf, a Democrat in office since 2015, issued 159 pandemic-related temporary reprieves for inmates. Of that number, 62 were returned to custody and Wolf commuted the sentences of 97. His office said he has issued 1,996 pardons -- more than any other governor in more than 20 years.

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HEADLINE	04/27 Florida Target shooting: 1 dead, 3 injured
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/florida-target-shooting-1-dead
GIST	<p>A deputy-involved shooting at a Target store in Kissimmee, Florida, Wednesday evening left at least one person dead and three others injured, according to reports.</p> <p>Two Osceola County Sheriff’s deputies were involved in the shooting and both are OK, Sheriff Marcos R. Lopez said, without going into detail about the shooting because of a pending Florida Department of Law</p>

	<p>Enforcement investigation, which is tasked without probing officer-involved shootings, FOX 35 in Orlando reported.</p> <p>"It's an officer-involved shooting. Two of our officers are involved," Lopez told reporters in a brief statement, according to WKMG-TV in Orlando reported. "They're fine. We have one deceased male and we're fully cooperating with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement."</p> <p>One victim was taken to the hospital with a gunshot wound and later died, FOX 35 in Orlando reported. Two victims were hurt while running away from the scene and another suffered a shrapnel injury in the hand.</p> <p>Their conditions have not been reported.</p> <p>Authorities haven't released any other details about the shooting.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 Thousands flee as gangs battle in Haiti
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/20-dead-thousands-flee-homes-gangs-battle-haiti-84362135
GIST	<p>PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti -- Criminal violence in Haiti worsened this week. with fighting among gangs in part of the capital chasing thousands from their homes and killing at least 20 people, including children.</p> <p>Haiti's Civil Protection Agency said the fighting began Sunday in four neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince, north of the international airport. At least a dozen homes were burned down and many of those who fled initially took shelter in the yard of a local mayor's office.</p> <p>The eruption comes amid a spike in violence and kidnappings as gangs grow more powerful and seek to control more territory amid the power vacuum following the July 7 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse.</p> <p>The situation has angered and frustrated Haitians, who are demanding action from Prime Minister Ariel Henry's administration, which is receiving international help to boost an underfunded and understaffed police force.</p> <p>A family of eight, including six children, was among those killed since Sunday, authorities said Wednesday. Schools and businesses in the area remain closed as thousands of families with children are camping in a park near a local mayor's office.</p> <p>"They need water, food, supplies," said Jean Raymond Dorcelly, who runs a small grassroots community organization. "They had to leave with nothing in their hands."</p> <p>He said that the neighborhood is usually quiet and that his child often plays in the park now turned into a makeshift outdoor shelter.</p> <p>"I can see kids crying because they're hungry and families don't have anything to provide to them," he said, adding that needs were growing as the fighting continued. "I don't know what it's going to be like tomorrow."</p> <p>Authorities said that along with the dead, two dozen people had been injured in the violence, and that one bullet hit an empty United Nations Humanitarian Air Service helicopter stationed near the airport.</p> <p>"The conflict is likely to escalate in the coming days, leading to further casualties and new population migrations," the Civil Protection Agency said.</p> <p>Officials warned that main roads leading to Haiti's northern region could be cut off as a result of the fighting.</p>

	<p>Gang violence in the Martissant community in southern Port-au-Prince already has cut off access to the country's southern region, which is trying to recover from last year's deadly earthquake.</p> <p>The Martissant violence displaced thousands of families last year that have spent months in overcrowded, unhygienic government shelters in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. It wasn't immediately clear where the newly displaced families would be staying.</p> <p>The Civil Protection Agency blamed this week's violence on a fight between the Chen Mechan gang and the rival 400 Mawozo gang, which was involved in the kidnapping of 17 U.S. missionaries last year.</p> <p>Haiti's ombudsman-like Citizen Protection Office released a statement condemning the violence. It criticized political leaders, saying their inaction and silence has brought "a form of cynicism or contempt for human rights, particular the right to life and security."</p> <p>The office also questioned whether the area known as Plaine du Cul de Sac was becoming another Martissant and called on authorities to assume their responsibility to protect citizens.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/27 FBI joins investigation into slain NH couple
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/fbi-joins-investigation-slain-couple-fear-grips-hampshire/story?id=84343197
GIST	<p>The FBI has joined the investigation into the fatal shootings of a retired couple whose bodies were found last week on a hiking trail near their New Hampshire home, leaving residents in their town fearful for their own safety, authorities said.</p> <p>No suspects have yet been identified and police have released little information on the mysterious double homicide in Concord, New Hampshire, of retired international humanitarian worker Stephen Reid, 67, and Djeswende "Wendy" Reid, 66.</p> <p>"We've been able to provide the information that we have, which is that we have no specific information that there's any danger to the public in general at this point in time, but be vigilant, and those families are going to have to make those decisions for themselves as to what's best for their family and what they're most comfortable with," Geoffrey Ward, a senior assistant state attorney general, said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The attorney general's office confirmed Tuesday that the FBI is assisting in the investigation.</p> <p>Despite reassurances from the authorities that no imminent danger is lurking in Concord, the state's capital, state Rep. Kris Schultz, D-Concord, said anxiety has permeated the city of nearly 44,000 people, where only seven murders have occurred in the past five years, according to the Concord Police Department's annual crime statistics.</p> <p>Schultz told ABC affiliate station WMUR in Manchester, New Hampshire, that the lack of answers has left many of her constituents on edge.</p> <p>"Do we need to be worried on an everyday basis in our neighborhood? Are we safe?" Schultz said. "This has been a safe community, and I believe it will continue to be, but I'm eager to hear more."</p> <p>'No. 1 priority' Concord Police Chief Bradley Osgood said solving the slayings is his department's "No. 1 priority."</p> <p>"We are dedicating resources to be more visible in the community to make people feel safer," Osgood said.</p> <p>The Reids were reported missing on April 20 when Stephen Reid failed to show up at a planned event, according to the state attorney general's office. Their bodies were discovered a day later off a hiking trail in a wooded and marshy area within the city's Broken Ground Trails system, officials said.</p>

Autopsies determined they both died from multiple gunshot wounds.

The Reids were last seen alive on April 18, when they left their home in the Alton Woods apartment complex around 2:30 p.m. and went for a walk in the Broken Ground Trails area.

Homicide investigators and the couple's children are asking the public to report any information that could possibly be helpful in cracking the case.

Couple shared 'mutual love of adventure'

The couple's family, including their children, Lindsay and Brian Reid, released a statement, describing Stephen and Wendy Reid as soulmates who traveled the world and shared a "mutual love of adventure and fitness."

The Reids moved to Concord about three years ago when Stephen Reid, who grew up in Concord, retired from a more than a 30-year career as an international development specialist working on humanitarian projects around the world through USAID, their family said.

The couple met while Wendy Reid, who was from West Africa, was studying in Washington D.C. on an athletic scholarship, the family said.

After graduating from the University of Notre Dame, Stephen Reid served in the Peace Corps in West Africa for four years, according to relatives.

"Steve's 30-plus year career as an international development specialist in service to the world's most vulnerable through USAID humanitarian projects could not have been made possible without the love, care and support of Wendy, who also helped recently resettled refugees acclimate and thrive in the United States," family members said in their statement.

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